

G R E A T   S A N D   D U N E S   N A T I O N A L  
M O N U M E N T

B A C K C O U N T R Y   M A N A G E M E N T  
P L A N

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# BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

Great Sand Dunes National Monument was established on March 17, 1932 by Presidential Proclamation No. 1994 ". . . for the preservation of the great sand dunes and additional features of scenic, scientific and educational interest. .". To ensure the proper preservation and management of these resources a Resource Management Plan was developed and approved in 1993. This Backcountry Management Plan is brief, and addresses specific concerns regarding present management actions, rather than providing great detail or analysis. It can be utilized as a separate document for operations, training, and familiarization purposes.

### Objectives

The resource protection goals, methods and desired results of managing the natural and cultural resources and the visitor will be briefly covered. A visitor's enjoyment of the resources, including wilderness values, should not cause unnecessary or severe resource damage. This plan should also serve as a guideline for employees to better understand the management of our backcountry and wilderness areas. It should also list management concerns regarding backcountry use.

### Natural Resources

The total acreage of the monument is 38,662 acres, or about 60 square miles, of which 39 square miles are dunes. A variety of habitats exist within the Great Sand Dunes Ecosystem including: bare sand dunes; sparsely to heavily vegetated dunes ; shrub and grasslands (prairie); **pinyon\juniper** forests; open-story, old-age ponderosa forests (previously logged) ; montane woodlands of Douglas and white fir, limber pine, spruce (limited), and aspen; meadows; riparian areas of cottonwood, willow and aspen; and limited wetlands. Wildlife is plentiful including mule deer, elk, pronghorn, coyotes, black bears, mountain lions, various rodents including kangaroo rats, and cottontail rabbits, over 182 species of birds; amphibians and reptiles including the garter snake. Over 850 species of insects occur in the park, of which four beetles are endemic (darkling, tiger and two anthicid) . Air and water quality is considered excellent, and the lack of unnatural sound is evident except for occasional overflights, and vehicle noises from the Medano Primitive Road.

### Cultural Resources

There is a rich history of occupation adjacent to or within the monument from the Folsom culture, Archaic, Anasazi and the Ute. Modern Native American concerns include the Ute, Apache and Northern Pueblo. Occasionally requests for utilizing sand are received as the dunes are considered sacred by some tribes.

Thirty nine archaeological sites are recorded within the monument with more likely to be found. Several of these sites lie along the western boundary where people have driven all- terrain vehicles and illegally removed artifacts. Documentation and increased patrols are needed for these sites. A grove of culturally-scarred ponderosa pines is perhaps the largest stand in North America. It deserves careful management regarding fire, and protection against vandalism. A protection-curation plan needs to be developed for the trees as they die, or approach death.

## **Inholdings**

Five inholdings within the monument total 2,260 acres. One of the inholdings borders the Medano Pass Primitive Road and before the year 2000 will become federal property. The four other tracts of land are in the northwest corner of the monument and contain significant acreage of sand dunes, and valuable riparian sections of Sand Creek. Purchase of these remaining inholdings is highly desirable.

## **WILDERNESS**

### **Boundary**

On October 20, 1976 President Ford signed Public law 94-567 which designated 33,450 acres as wilderness with 670 acres designated as a potential wilderness addition in future years. This plan will guide wilderness management until a separate Wilderness Management Plan is developed. In 1979, as amended by Public Law 96-87, the area for potential wilderness was increased to 2,505 acres. Ninety-three per cent of the monument is either wilderness, or potential wilderness.

In 1993 the **Sangre** de Cristo Wilderness Area was designated within the Rio Grande National Forest. The east and north boundaries of the park are now bordered by forest service wilderness, and provides a compatible management zone for backcountry and wilderness areas within the monument.

### **Access**

Wilderness access is by foot, or horseback. As provided in the Great Sand Dunes wilderness legislation patrol vehicles are still allowed to use the Little Medano Fire Road, and travel along the monument's south and west boundaries. When the access easement for the fire road expires (1999), this road will be closed and turned into a hiking trail. Use of the unimproved route along the fenced southern and western boundaries is needed for maintenance, to conduct research, and as access to Sand Creek and other remote areas of the park. Four-wheel drive vehicles with floatation tires, or all terrain vehicles are needed for patrolling this area.

In 1976 the Wilderness Act prohibited vehicles from driving within the wilderness boundary. However, vehicles were still allowed to drive within Medano Creek from Sand Pit to Castle Creek. This route allowed vehicles to bypass an extremely sandy portion of the Medano Pass Primitive Road where four-wheel drive vehicles would often get stuck resulting in congestion and resource damage. A wilderness designation map shows the eastern boundary line drawn in the middle of Medano Creek, which included portions of the bypass. In June, 1992 it was temporarily closed due to severe bank erosion (high water due to spring snowmelt), and vehicles getting stuck in the creek bed. After an environmental assessment and public hearings, the bypass was permanently closed in the fall of 1992.

Access exceptions are granted for research provided: 1) the research is essential for the understanding, protection and management of the resources, 2) negligible resource damage results from the research activity, 3) the exception is for a limited

time, and 4) the exception is documented in writing, including justification, length, etc. and receives written approval by the superintendent. Exceptions may also be granted for emergency medical and search and rescue services when life is at risk upon approval by the superintendent, or their designated representative, ie. the Chief Ranger.

## **Signing**

The wilderness boundary as designated has created several operational problems. Because of the midstream boundary line within Medano Creek accurate signing is difficult. Boundary signs must be erected on either bank to prevent their being washed away or destroyed. From an operational standpoint the wilderness boundary will be considered to be the east bank of Medano Creek. Much of the wilderness boundary is unsigned. Portions of the boundary are signed along the Medano Pass Primitive Road, the main park road, and monument boundaries.

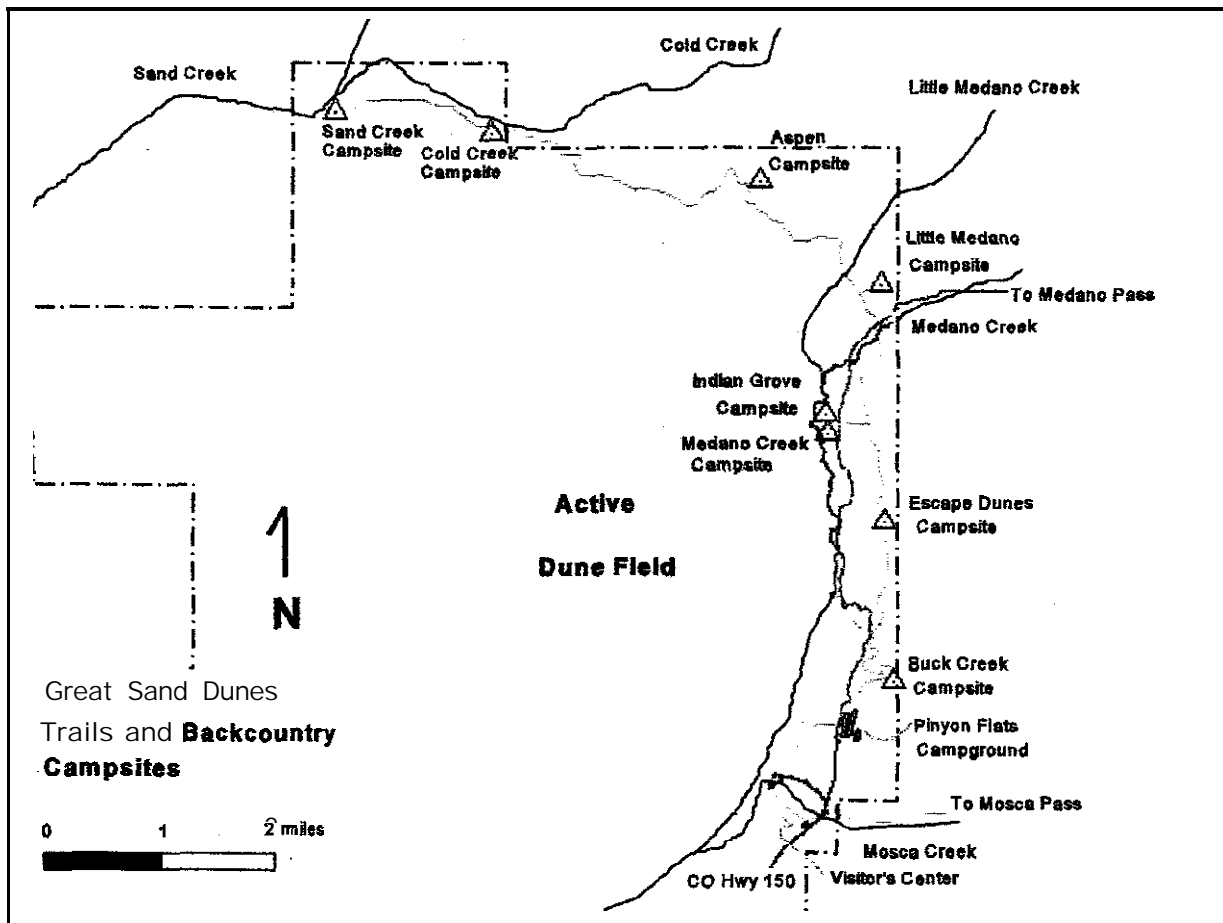
## **Values**

Much of the wilderness at Great Sand Dunes has exceptional wilderness values. However in several portions intense use occurs, and they are managed differently by necessity. The **main** visitor dune use area is within the designated wilderness. This 500 acre area extends northwest from the dunes parking area to the "high dune", then northeast to the Medano Creek streambed at the end of the campground trail. With over a quarter million visitors entering this "wilderness", values like solitude, quiet, and little evidence of human presence are often absent. These values are also lacking near the Sand Pit and Castle Creek Day-Use Areas (primarily on weekends and holidays), and along the main park road (the wilderness boundary is just west of the paved road) due to noise and visibility of traffic on the road. While these areas are part of the designated wilderness, and no motorized vehicles or facilities will be allowed, they will be managed as the intensive visitor use areas they have always been.

## **Threats**

Management concerns involve trespass grazing, cultural resource vandalism, military overflights which threaten natural low ambient sound levels, off-road vehicle use, bear management, poaching, nearby water development prospects, future **mining** threats, and the inability to acquire inholdings with wilderness potential. The monument staff does not perceive visitor day, and overnight use to be a problem at this time. An expansion of the trail and backcountry campsite system in 1994 has occurred to facilitate wilderness access by park visitors.

Portions of the south and western boundary fence are maintained by Medano Ranch staff. The Medano Ranch raises bison. On occasion bison break through park fences. Fences bordering the other inholdings and the **Baca** Grant are often vandalized and down. Cattle trespass still occurs. A solar-powered electric fence encloses wetlands along the west boundary to keep bison out, but elk frequently jump over the fence and short out the system. Increased backcountry patrol of these areas is needed, but budget/staffing limitations and frontcountry workloads make it difficult to carry out these tasks.



## **BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT**

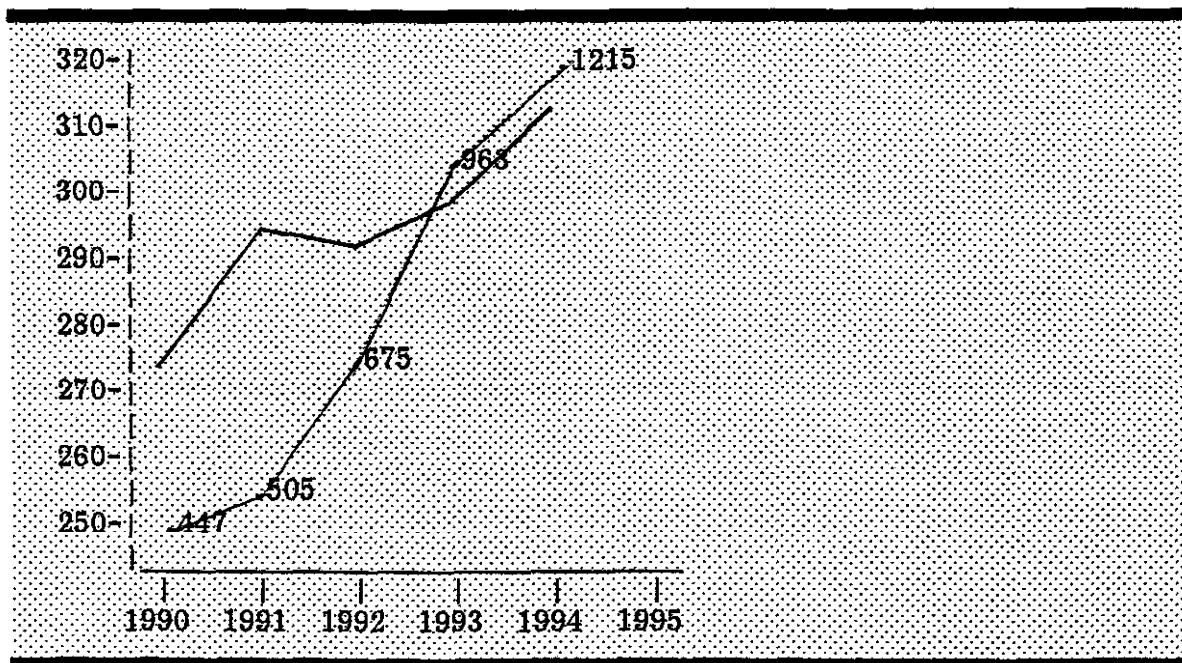
### **Backcountry Permit System -Background**

The backcountry permit system at Great Sand Dunes probably began in the **mid-**1970's. In 1988 four designated sites were accessible along the Medano Pass Primitive Road,. Sand Pit and Castle Creek sites were changed to day-use areas in 1989, leaving only Medano Creek and Indian Grove for campers. By 1993 Escape Dunes and Little Medano were added, and in 1994 five more sites were created, including an accessible camp with a hardened trail in Sawmill Canyon. The camp was not opened in 1994 due to a back-ordered toilet.

### **Procedures - Statistics**

Permits are required for all overnight stays in the wilderness and in designated campsites. They are issued free of charge at the visitor center, or on occasion by field rangers. Dash tags are required for overnight parking in the monument to access adjacent forest service lands -- permits are optional. Many visitors register for Mosca Canyon, and other nearby areas. Permits are sent to the Rio Grande National Forest yearly. Camping statistics are compiled annually for backcountry, and forest use, but none for day hikers. Installation of **trail** counters or registers would be desirable.

Most backcountry use occurs April through September. Since 1992 permits issued have increased 89%. In 1993 56% of all permits were for dunes wilderness camping; in 1994 it dropped to 39%. About 100 USFS permits are issued yearly. Visitation in 1994 was over 312,00 with use increasing in spring and fall. (See graph below - drop due partly to persons per vehicle count change).



**Annual Visitation (blue, in thousands) vs. Backcountry User Nights (red, Actual) at Great Sand Dunes National Monument**

## Trails

At present there are over 18 miles of established trails, eight backcountry campsites, one accessible camp, and 5.2 miles of four-wheel public accessible roads within the monument. In the wilderness portion of the backcountry are about 18 miles of unimproved roads, three backcountry campsites, one ranger camp and 7.1 miles of trail.

A trails map is being revised for 1995. Individual site maps for each backcountry campsite, a handout for dune mass users, and a backcountry camping handout were created in 1994. The park color brochure needs to be updated to include additional **trails**, text changes and mark campsites if so desired.

Trailheads should provide a set number of parking spaces, be uniformly marked with standard signs: routed, stained wood signs with white letters; no bicycles, horses (if allowed), and pets on leash (3-M).

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In general five types of **trails** exist within the monument:

Class One: Paved or hardened surface trails with no set width or grade. Many of these trails are for physically challenged visitors and do have set standards in slope, width, surface, resting spots, turnarounds, etc. This would include boardwalks, and the **handicamp**, access to restrooms, etc.

**Class** Two: Gravel trails three to five feet in width, various gradients. Examples are campground trails, and sections of trails around the visitor center, or trailheads.

Class Three: Natural surface trails three to five feet in width; usually frontcountry. The Little Medano Trail from PONR to Pinyon Flats Campground, Pinyon Flats Trail, etc.

**Class** Four: Either frontcountry or backcountry trails, natural surface, with normal improvements (waterbars, steps, bridges, trimming) one to three feet in width.

Class Five: Primitive routes, or trails with minimal improvements and markings.

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Social **trails** are evident especially in the campground, along the Pinyon Flats trail and the Medano Pass Primitive Road between its **beginning** and Buck Creek; at trailheads, and within backcountry sites. Cutting switchbacks is a problem in some areas. There is a need for increased trail maintenance mostly due to natural erosion and plant invasion. Visitor and Resource Protection personnel perform most trail maintenance; volunteer groups and park staff are used on occasion for special projects, or cyclical maintenance.



## **Camping**

There are several types of camping experiences within and adjacent to the monument. Most park visitors stay at the Pinyon Flats Campground, which is a frontcountry fee campground with running water, flush toilets, fire grates, and limited concession items. Right backcountry sites provide a marked, destination type of experience accessible by trail (or a short walk from roads in some situations) .

Wilderness camping can be experienced on the dunes, or in other park environs within a designated area. (See Reference Map in Appendices) **Trails** and roads can provide initial access to some of these areas, but soon trails cease to exist and the hiker relies on their own orienteering skills. Wilderness trail and non-trail hiking is also available in United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands surrounding the monument. Car camping is available along the Medano Pass Primitive Road on National Forest lands where vehicles can pull off the road and pitch a tent, and build a fire.

A wheelchair accessible backcountry camp was constructed in 1994 adjacent to Sawmill Creek. It is available by reservation. The parking area can accommodate 2 vehicles. The trail surface was hardened with a "stabilizer" substance. Most of the construction was completed by hand using park personnel and some volunteer work: (Telephone Pioneers, Boy Scouts of America, and court-ordered community service. ) The camp was partly funded by the National Park Foundation. Maximum grade for the 0.1 mile trail is six per cent with most sections two to four per cent. A modified picnic table, elevated grill, elevated tent pad, composting toilet, and metal food/wood storage containers denote the campsite.

1. Have visitor fill out first three lines and vehicle description information. Please print!
2. Ask what kind of camping they wish to experience, or where they want to go.. Describe opportunities in the monument and assist them in their choice if needed.
3. Fill out the entire left side of the permit (see copy). Include horse information if appropriate. Write campsite name(s) on lines at upper right side, and number of nights. Write where vehicle will be parked \*.
4. Read the regulations on the sheet to them out loud. Write "REGS" on comments line.
5. Ask them to date and sign on the visitor's signature line. Say "By \_\_\_\_\_ this line you agree to abide by the regulations of this permit." A park ranaer should date/sign the permit.
6. Give them the hard copy, ask them to attach it to their pack while walking, and a tent while at the site. They DO NOT need to check back in. The park does not accept any responsibility for their well-being.
7. Fill out the correct colored month parking permit--have them place it on the dash.
8. Give them the free map handout, & site sheet.
9. If they are camping in the USFS, fill out the yellow card, and give them a dash tag.
10. Put the pink copy on the clip board and write in the party name and number of users on the master log sheet.
11. Place the white copy (or USFS card) in the In-Box of the law enforcement ranger division.

IMPORTANT!!!

Horses and llamas are allowed to camp in the wilderness areas of the monument. Weed-free hay or pellets must be brought in for feed.

\* Parking within the monument is allowed only at Montville T.H., the amphitheater lot, and Point of No Return. At times (some holidays) vehicle numbers (and therefore visitor numbers) will be limited. Overflow parking is available at the HQ parking lot if the other lots fill their quota (5 cars/lot)

## BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING REGULATIONS

- 1) Camp at designated sites only. (Main Dune Mass campers must camp over the first crest line, out of sight of day users).
- 2) Park vehicles overnight in permitted areas only.
- 3) Use gas stoves. Open fires are prohibited.
- 4) Pets are allowed on leashes (maximum 6'). Be aware that summer sand can burn their footpads.
- 5) Pack out all trash.
- 6) One party per site with a maximum of 6 people.
- 7) Water is limited or nonexistent. Treat all backcountry water sources. Ticks are present usually from April through June.
- 8) Camp within a 50' radius of the brown metal arrowhead on a post.
- 9) Bury human waste at least 6 " deep.

Failure to obey these rules will **result:** in fines/citations.

## Hiking

There are no statistics on hiking use within the monument. The majority of park visitors hike **along** Medano Creek, to the base of the dunes and to the summit of the high eastern dune. A large number **also** hike from the campground to the creek and dunes, and up the Mosca Pass **trail**. There are no **trail** counters at this time. **Installing** voluntary registration boxes at **trailheads** is being considered for 1995. Research strategy planning has identified a need to study biker impact on the corridor from the dunes lot area to the high ridge concerning plants and insect **life**. A summit register was **installed** on the high eastern dune in February, 1995.

From 1992 to 1994 **trails** and campsites were plotted using a GPS unit. A comprehensive map is being developed. The **following** is a list of **trails within** the monument with accurate mileages :

<u>Number/Name of Trail</u>	<u>Distance</u>	<u>Class &amp; Use</u>
1) <b>Montville</b> Nature <b>Trail</b>	0.5 mi.	3, moderate
2) <b>Wellington</b> Ditch <b>Trail</b>	0.9 mi.	3, moderate
3) Visitor Center to <b>Montville</b>	0.3 mi.	4, very light
4) <b>Pinyon Flats</b> <b>Trail</b>	0.6 mi.	3, <b>light</b>
5) Visitor Center to Dunes	0.4 mi.	4, light
6) Little Medano <b>Trail</b>	5.1 mi.	3 & 4, moderate
7) Sand Pit <b>Trail</b>	0.5 Dli.	4, moderate
8) Sand Creek <b>Trail</b>	6.4 mi.	5, very light
9) Dunes Overlook <b>Trail</b>	0.5 mi.	3, moderate
10) <b>Denton</b> Springs <b>Trail</b>	0.7 mi.	4, very light
11) Various Connector <b>Trails</b>	1.2 mi.	4, <b>light</b>
12) Campground to Dunes	0.5 mi.	3, <b>heavy</b>
13) Mosca Pass <b>Trail</b>	3.5 mi.*	4, moderate
14) Barn to Visitor Center	0.5 mi.	4, <b>light</b>
15) Picture Point <b>Trail</b>	0.1 <b>mi.</b>	1, heavy
16) <b>Sawmill</b> Canyon	0.1 mi.	1, light

\* not included in **total** mileage

There are 18.21 **miles** of established **trails** within the monument. The **walk** to the high eastern dune is about 1.22 **miles** if ridges are **followed** in the most direct path. Returning straight down to the dunes lot is about 1.1 **miles**.

# Great Sand Dunes

National Park Service  
11500 Highway 150  
Mosca, Colorado 81146  
719-378-2312

Hike the dune mass,  
the pinon-juniper forest,  
or upland into the mountains.  
Discover this unique resource yourself. . .

## HIKING OPPORTUNITIES

### MAIN DUNE MASS

Wander where you please on the dunes—there are no established trails in the sand. Wear shoes—in summer, surface temperatures can reach 140°F! Take water and sunscreen; a jacket is advisable. When storm clouds roll in, GET OFF THE DUNES; lightning is a danger on the vast dune expanses.

A climb to the top of the tallest dune (about 700 feet from the base) takes about one hour; from the top gaze upon miles of picturesque peaks and slipfaces.

In spring, frolic in Medano Creek (generally flowing April through June). Observe the water pulse in surges or “waves” in the creekbed, a unique, fascinating phenomena.

Traverse the dunes at night. On a moonlit and star-filled night, watch closely for the giant sand treader camel cricket or the Great Sand Dunes tiger beetle in the sand. Both insects are found nowhere else in the world!

### ACCESS TRAILS TO MAIN DUNE MASS

Hike the dunes from the dunes parking area or from two foot trails: one trail originates at the Visitor Center and the other at the campground near the entrance to Medano Pass Primitive Road. In the campground, you may access this trail near campsite 34.

### PICTURE POINT TRAIL

A few strides along Picture Point Trail at the Visitor Center lends itself to several scenic stops; take your camera along. (Wheelchair negotiable.)

### PINYON FLATS TRAIL (3/4 MILE ONE WAY)

Walk the Pinyon Flats Trail through grasslands near the base of the dunes. The trail connects the campground with the dunes parking area and picnic area.

### MONTVILLE NATURE TRAIL

(1/2 MILE AROUND LOOP)

Take a self-guided hike on the Montville Nature Trail that circles the lower portion of Mosca Canyon. Using the guide available at the trailhead for a nominal fee, learn the natural features and colorful early history of Mosca Pass. Pause along Mosca Creek; it is a shady oasis on hot, summer days. Spectacular views of the dunes can be seen from high points along the trail.

## **Driving/ Biking**

Driving in the backcountry is available along 5.2 miles of rough, sandy roads from the campground to the east boundary where the Medano Pass Primitive Road enters forest service lands. The first mile is accessible to two-wheel drive vehicles except during winter when snow and ice often make it impassable. The remaining portion of the road is often closed at the park boundary, or at Castle Creek due to drifting snow. There is one creek crossing at Shockey's Crossing which often causes difficulties to motorists during periods of high **runnoff**. Vehicles **occassionally** become stranded in the crossing. Several more crossings on Forest Service Lands cause considerable difficulty and damage to vehicles.

Off-road vehicle use is a continual problem along the Medano Pass Primitive Road. Certain problem areas have fencing, cables and posts, posts, or logs to help prevent driving off-road. Unlicensed vehicles (dune buggies, modified vehicles, dirt bikes and all terrain vehicles) and two-wheel drive vehicles continue to use the road as well. Visitors are usually cited when contacted.

Mountain bikes can travel on this road when it is wet (firm sand) or frozen. With much snow, or drier conditions the road is impassable to bikes. Bikes are prohibited on all park trails. Mountain bike tracks are frequently found on some trails (Wellington Ditch, Campground to Dunes), and along Medano Creek between the Sand Pit and the Dunes Lot.

# GUIDE TO MEDANO PASS PRIMITIVE ROAD

<u>Location</u>	<u>Mileage</u>	<u>Comments</u>
End of Paved Road	0.0	Begin Primitive Road
Garden Creek	0.2	Flows until mid-summer
Buck Creek	0.5	
Sawmill Creek	1.0	Flows until mid-summer
Point of No Return	1.1	Trailhead, 4-wd only beyond
Ponderosa Point	1.4	Picnic Area
Sand Pit	1.8	Day use only, picnic tables
Castle Creek	2.6	Day use only, picnic tables
Horse Canyon Crossing	3.3	
Medano Cr. Campsite	3.8	Obtain a backcountry permit
Indian Grove Campsite	4.0	Obtain a backcountry permit
Shockey's Crossing	4.5	Use caution in high water
Fire Road	4.6	Foot traffic allowed
Little Medano Trail	5.0	Hiking access to northern dunes and Sand Creek
Monument Boundary	5.2	USFS Route #235
Medano Creek crossing	5.6	Tough mud hole across creek
Road Spur	5.9	Meadows beyond
Medano Creek crossing	6.1	4th time
Frenchman's Cabin	6.2	Old Herard homestead, 1875
Medano Creek crossing	6.4	
Medano Creek crossing	6.8	
Cliff to left	6.9	Good campsites just ahead
Tight squeeze	7.5	Boulders along road
Medano Creek crossing	7.6~	
Creek crossing	7.7	
Road spur to north	7.7	
Three Alternatives	7.8	Middle way usually best
Medano Creek crossing	7.9	Road gets steeper
Spur to north	8.4	Pinnacles, and cliffs
Creek crossing	8.6	
Beaver Dams	8.8	Long meadows
Three Cabins	9.0	
Road to north	9.3	
Medano Creek crossing	9.6	Left fork of road (u) best
Meadows	10.0	
Creek crossing	10.8	
Medano Lake T.H.	10.7	Trailhead 1/2 mile, lake 2.5
Ditch	11.0	Steep ahead
Medano Pass	11.2	10,040
Viewpoint	11.3	Turn left uphill, mtn. views

The new Sanare de Cristo Wilderness preserves 226,455 acres of the Rio Grande and San Isabel National Forests and BLM lands too. Vehicles must stay on established roads - no off-road driving. Dogs must be leashed, or under control (voice, etc.) at all times. Only dead and down trees may be cut for cooking' fires while camping. Pack out all trash. Use a stove wherever possible. Camp at least 100' from roads or water. Keep party sizes small to reduce impact.

## BEAR MANAGEMENT

In past years bear encounters vary widely, mostly occurring in frontcountry areas (residents, picnic area, dumpster, etc. ) but increased bear sightings and activity show that backcountry users must be wisely educated concerning proper food storage and waste disposal. Each backcountry campsite handout mentions hanging food. A free pamphlet on bears is available to campers, and when bear activity is **occurring**, backcountry campers are warned. Bears have rarely raided backcountry campsites, and visitors have not reported any serious encounters.

Rangers have used rubber slugs, sirens and noise-making devices to discourage problem bears from seeking garbage. Evening trash collection, fencing/closing the dumpster, and signing have helped reduce bear sightings and dependence on human food and garbage. Bear-proof cans will help alleviate bears from seeking food from humans and eventually reduce conflict with backcountry users by non-association.

## Emergency Services

A Search and Rescue Plan exists for the monument. **Occassionally** these activities occur in the backcountry. Training is held several times a year for park staff and valley rescue groups. No technical rescues are recorded in past history. The potential does exist as some rock climbing occurs within, or adjacent to the monument, and ice climbing is present in nearby areas where park staff may be called to help Alamosa or Saguache counties, or other government agencies in the event of a lost person, or injured climber. Limited park equipment exists. Plans are underway to obtain a wheel for our litter, and rigging for technical lowers. Winter use is light, as snow depth is usually marginal for skiing. Sledding on the **dunes** presents the possibility of serious injury as steep dunes often end (flatten-out) abruptly.

## STOCK USE

All pack animals (horses, mules, llamas, goats, etc. ) are allowed anywhere in the park except frontcountry, high visitor-use areas. This essentially prohibits their use on all trails except the Little Medano Trail north from Point of No Return, the Sand Creek Trail, the trail from Point of No Return to the Sand Pit, and the Mosca Pass Trail. They may cross roads to gain access to these trails **or** permissible backcountry areas. A handout on horse use is given to vehicles with trailers at the Entrance Station. Horses may be used by individual hunters to pack supplies through the monument for private hunting camps outside the park, **but weapons and ammunition may not be packed through the monument.** Legally taken game may be packed on horses through the monument if it is covered, and tagged properly. A ranger must be notified.

The need for established stock camps along the trail system is a possibility in future years. As of 1994 it would be easy for stock trips to camp in the USFS Cold Creek drainage.



## RESEARCH NEEDS

Monitoring of backcountry campsites was begun in 1994 and will continue indefinitely in order to measure how visitors affect campsites, vegetation, soils, etc. (An evaluation form is included in the appendices). Trails and other necessary areas or sites (**archaeological** sites, social trails, etc. ) should be evaluated as needed. Several other needed **research** projects specific to the Research Management Division include :

- 1) Fire **History** & Post-Fire Monitoring: a wildfire plan is expected to be completed in 1995 which will determine **supression** activities and prescribed burning methods to manage the culturally scarred ponderosa pine trees, or other habitats.
- 2) Complete **Documentation** of **Culturally-Scarred** Ponderosa Pines: need to locate, interpret, protect and manage individual trees or groves.
- 3) Document & **Inventory Archaeological** Sites: to protect these sites many must be relocated; most of the park has not been surveyed.
- 4) VERP Studies: should be considered, especially in the crowded dunes lot to high dune area. Surveying backcountry users (day and overnight) would provide useful information to better manage the backcountry.
- 5) Vegetation & Wildlife **Monitoring**: baseline data should be gathered and a monitoring program instigated. Do park visitors affect these resources? Can proactive resource management be utilized in response to external or internal threats, population fluctuations, etc. ?
- 6) Day-use **impact** in the main dunes visitor use corridor: its **afects** on fragile dune plants, & animals (including insect life and behavior).

All of these research needs affect backcountry management in a variety of ways. Currently data about, geology, sand movement, water quality, hydrology, air quality, & sound monitoring are being conducted. The Resource Management Plan and Resource Management Strategy covers most of these concerns in more **detail**.

## **EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION**

One of the primary goals in backcountry management is to conserve park resources as much **as** possible, yet still provide for use by visitors. Educating the visitor, and interpreting the monument's resources is essential for success in accomplishing this difficult task.. Interpretive programs should help the visitor to understand the purpose of the monument, and the National Park Service, and how these working philosophies guide backcountry management decisions.

In order to conserve and protect the monument's resources, visitors should gain knowledge through **media** and interpretive processes to:

- 1) learn about the Great Sand Dunes ecosystem and its various components
- 2) grow to appreciate these resources
- 3) acquire or strengthen their conservation ethic
- 4) access information on backcountry camping, low-impact use methods, hiking, riding, hunting, safety, and other activities or uses.

Methods to accomplish these tasks should be derived by division cooperation and be evident in evening programs, **community/school** outreach programs, the park newspaper, bulletin boards, handouts, construction & maintenance activities, roving contacts, walks and talks, and at information centers.

## PATROL GUIDELINES

A position description under Backcountry Ranger Position Duties explains the duties of a backcountry ranger, or a frontcountry ranger on bc patrol. Common duties and **problems** are noted. Communication of various subjects is necessary to convey needed information to the visitor including **route-finding/orienteering**, safety issues, pet policies, giardia which is present in waters of the monument, ticks and associated fevers, biting insects, food storage/bear problems, proper waste disposal, feeding wildlife, gathering of nuts and berries (esp. **pinyon** nuts), weather, high water crossings, driving in sand, horse etiquette, walking on vegetated dune areas, and many other issues.

Common violations in the backcountry are : no permit, fires, camped in undesignated area, cutting switchbacks, dogs off leash, theft of archaeological resources, **off-road** vehicles, alcohol and open container violations, hunting, littering, and destruction of natural resources. Violation statistics are compiled yearly, but backcountry statistics have not been separated from overall statistics.

Coverage of the Medano Primitive Road should occur at least two to three times daily during the **main** season of visitation. Some days less patrols are done because of reduced use, or other responsibilities. The backcountry sites should be checked frequently, and the Sand **Creek** trail backcountry sites at least every 1 or 2 weeks. Weekends require visits to these areas.

## DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GRSA BACKCOUNTRY RANGER (GS-4, 5)

1. Enforces federal & state laws, CFR, etc. Gives verbal & written **warnings**, issues citations, makes arrests, testifies in court.. Includes **PC patrol** duties as scheduled.
2. Primary care provider for three horses:
  - feeding, **grooming**, care
  - transport, vet needs
  - record keeping (horse files, riding, vet)
  - **clean barn**, stalls, **corral**, water trough, etc.
  - ensure others are doing **chores**
  - receive training, train others
  - make **minor fence** and **tack** repairs
  - **maintain saddles**, tack
  - purchase needed supplies (medical, grain, hay)
  - Ride when scheduled to **backcountry**
3. Patrols/inspects **Medano Rd.** accessible backcountry sites daily (mom or eve) by foot or **horse**: Buck Cr., Sawmill Canyon, Sand Pit Day Use Area, Castle Creek Day Use Area, **Escape Dunes**, **Medano Cr.**, Indian grove, Little **Medano**.
4. Ride or bike to **Sand Creek Ranger Camp** at least 1/pay period (**every** two weeks) , via **Sand Creek Trail**. Drive or take **ATV** from S. boundary far day trip atleast 1x eaah 2 weeks. Inspect boundary archaalogioal sites every 2 weeks.
5. Maintains Trails and campsites:
  - trim branches
  - chop **grass**, exotics
  - knock **rxs.** off trail
  - **hazard** trees
  - water bars, steps
  - trash
  - maintain signs (paint, bolts, inventory, **add/remove**)
  - **check/repair bridges**.
  - oordinate work w/ Rds. & Trails Work Leader
  - Restoration work (logs, rxs, campfires, vandalism, **excelsor** blankets, **seeding**, **social trails**,etc.)
  - monitor sites
6. Disseminates camping and hiking **information** in field, issues permits **through** Dispatch.
7. Assists in **training** park staff in **bc** operations **when possible**.
8. **Maintains**, updates **BC** drawer (dash tags, **xerox** copies), **information** at **VC**.
9. Compiles monthly stats for year-end **l.e.** report.

10. Assists Resource **Management Division** w/ projects as needed (flumes, transects, sand traps, **GPS**, etc.)
11. **Maintains** physiaal fitness.
12. Assists in **SAR** and **EMS** operations.
13. **Maintains proficiency** in wildfire supression.
14. Checks boundaries of park as assigned. Add signs where needed, repair fences, gates, add **carsonite** boundary markers, proficient w/ map and compass, assist w/ **GPS**.
15. Prepares daily BC patrol reports, **CIR's**, etc.
16. Completes wildlife **observation cards**.
17. Performs adequate hunting patrol as assigned.

BACKCOUNTRY PATROL REPORT

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Hiles patrolled: \_\_\_\_\_ Foot \_\_\_\_\_ Ski \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Norse \_\_\_\_\_ 4wd \_\_\_\_\_

Destination \_\_\_\_\_

Shift \_\_\_\_\_ Trailhead (Start/Finish) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Accomplished: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Wildlife Sightings: \_\_\_\_\_

Visitor Contacts \_\_\_\_\_ Backcountry permits Checked \_\_\_\_\_  
(Roving \_\_\_\_\_)

Other/Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal. Warnings \_\_\_\_\_

Written Warnings \_\_\_\_\_

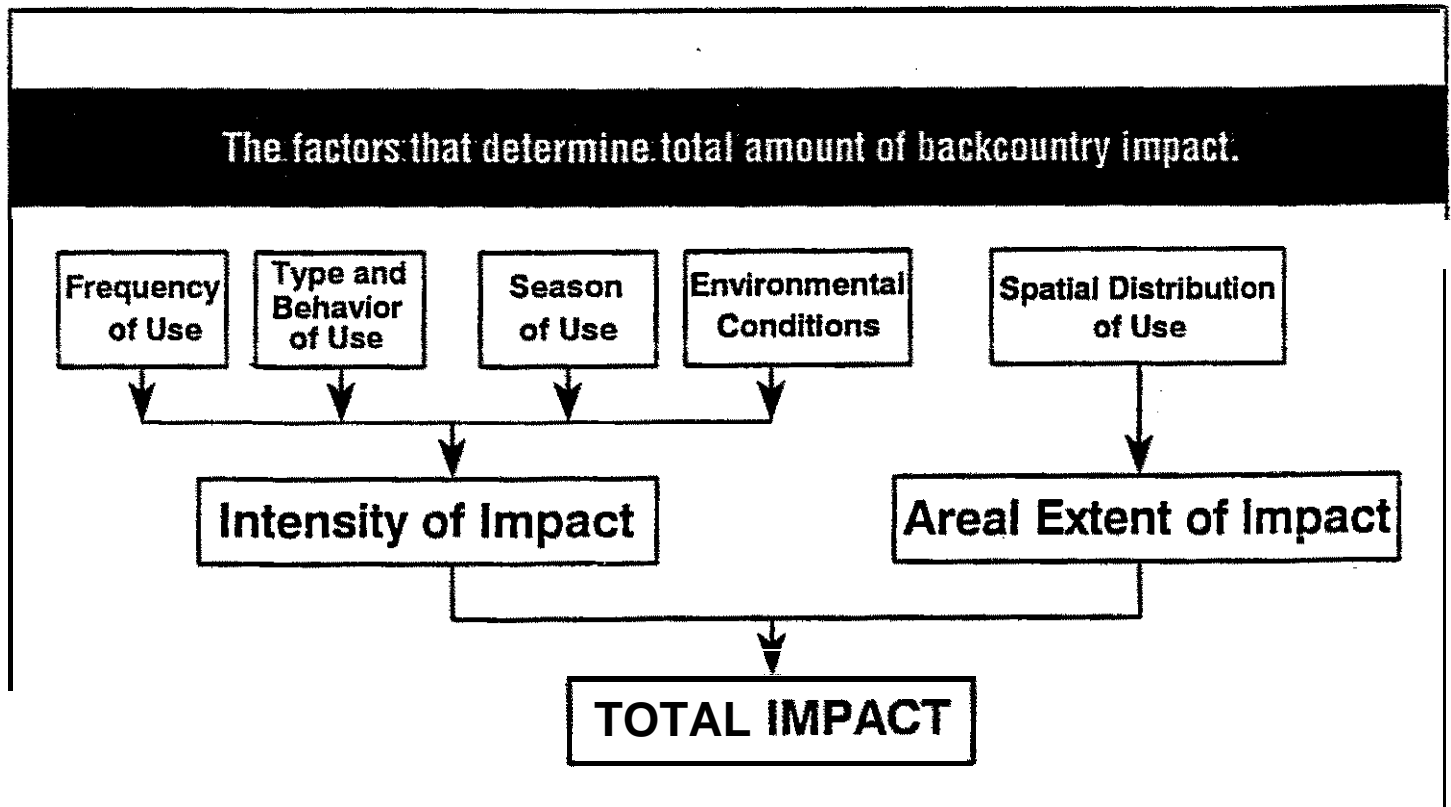
\_\_\_\_\_ Citations P# \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_

## RESOURCE MONITORING

**Campsites** should be evaluated yearly for hazard trees and loose limbs which **hang** over tent sites. Waste disposal should be investigated (look under rocks, **too close** to water, **etc.**) to ensure that **excess** waste is not yet a problem. Impact on vegetation (tent impact, firewood gathering, etc.) **should** be noted and recorded. Frequency of campsite use will be recorded for the **year** (permits), no-shows **or** leaving early should be corrected at the **VC**. Erosion, Litter, signing, fire rings and other **problems/violations** should be **noted**. A monitoring sheet (enclosed) should be used yearly to note **changes** in the site. Photographs should be taken every year **initially**.

In the future it would be helpful to survey visitor use to gain **an** understanding of their impact, needs, activities and comments on the present system. **Day** use & overnight use should be evaluated to determine their impact on park resources by an approved method. Backcountry impact could be **evaluated** using the flow chart shown below.

(See appendices for "**Backcountry** Campsite **Evaluation Form**" and "**Wildlife** Observation **Cards**")



## **SAND CREEK RANGER CAMP**

A ranger patrol camp is located on Sand Creek in the northwestern corner of the monument. It consists of a wood frame (**w/** floor) and canvas outfitter% tent, picnic table, toilet, fire grate, corral, storage boxes and two sheds. A stove, lantern, wok kit, wildfire pack and gear, 4 sleeping bags, pads, dome tent, axe, shovel and other tools, etc. are available. The tent sleeps four people comfortably on cots (could hold up to 6 people), and if more bags are taken the camp will accommodate at least 8 people (2 more in the backpacking tent). A bear bag/cable **is** present and should be utilized. An annual inventory should be completed.

During the summer season a ranger is scheduled to be there on a weekly basis if at all possible. Other divisions (Resource Management, Interpretation, Maintenance and Administration) are encouraged to utilize the camp during work projects, or lieu days. The camp receives more patrol use on holidays and during hunting **season**.

Fishing is generally good from June through mid-September. The horse corral can hold several horses overnight. Hay, grain and grooming supplies are located in sheds, but grain may need to be packed **in** due to bears raiding the grain can. The camp toilet should be moved to various locales as each hole becomes full. A future composting toilet should be purchased when funds become available. A wood stove was added in 1994 to heat the tent in cold weather (hunting season).



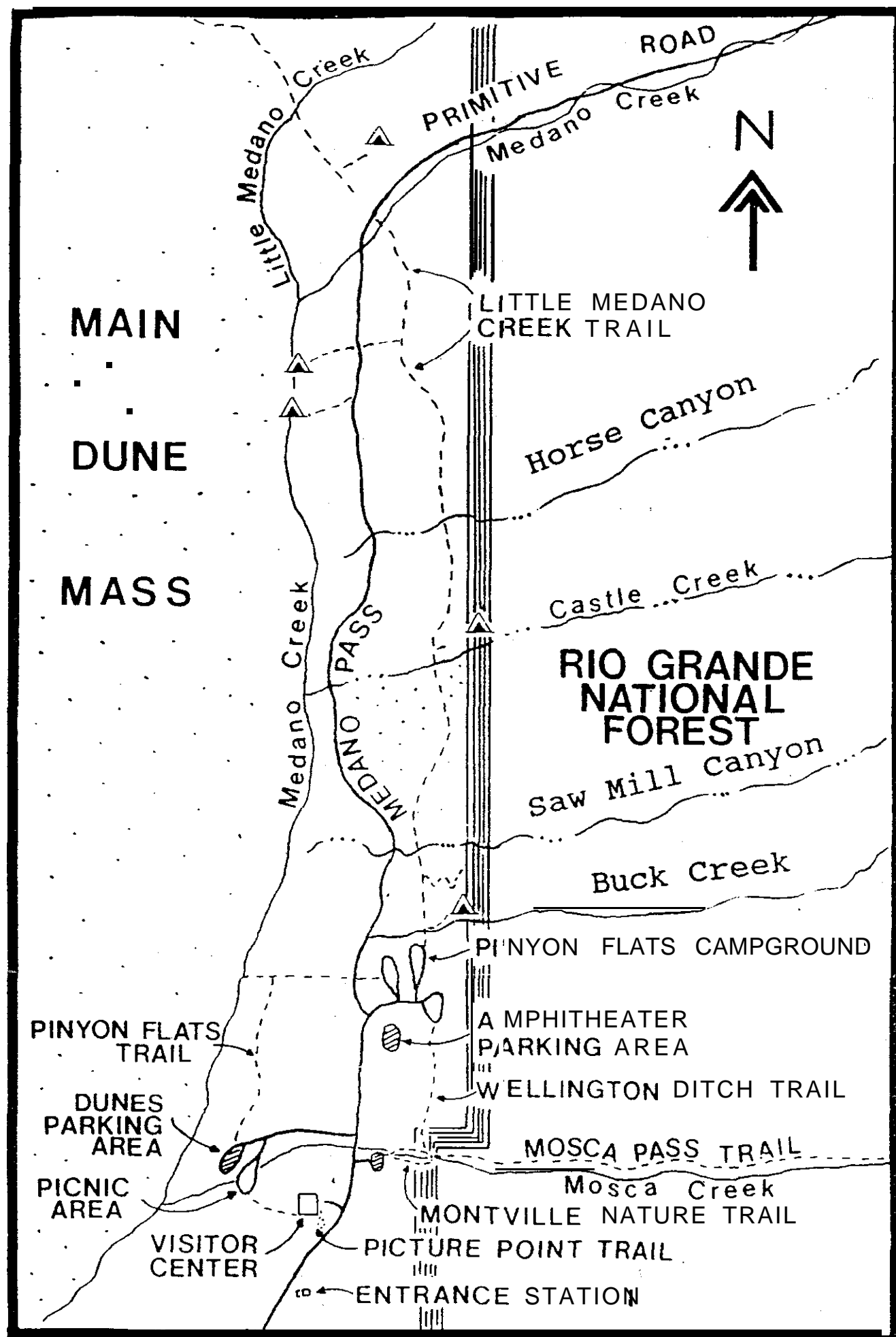
## SAND CREEK INVENTORY

1 Mirror	1 Coleman lantern (propane)
4 16.4 oz. Propane bottle	1 Roll weather stripping
3 rolls paper towels	4 rolls toilet paper
1 wash basin	1 2-man REI tent
6 garbage bags	1 skillet
1 Towel	1 medium pot
1 face cloth	2 dish towels
1 small pot	1 bowl/plate
4 D-Cell batteries	1 bag misc food
2 REI sleeping bags	1 bag matches
1 headlamp	6 forks
3 spoons	1 fuel funnel
1 stove	1 first-aid kit
1 water purifier	2 can's Coleman fuel
2 blue tarps	1 compass w/ directions
1 Flare	1 bottle insect repellent
1 light sticks	2 rolls flagging
1 flat screw driver	1 shovel
1 parachute cord	1 Phillips screwdriver
1 crescent wrench	2 horse brushes
1 pair pliers	1 set hobbles
1 hammer	1 hoofpick
1 fence pliers	4 leather straps
1 roll wire	2 spools barbed wire
1 can nails	1 carbonite fence pounder
1 5 qt. canteen	fence stakes
2 metal truck boxes	10 linear posts
1 pulaski	2 water bottles
1/2 garbage can grain	1 park map
1 Forest Service map	1 fuel flask
6 bales hay	1 canvas tarp
2 small bottle dish soap	2 lantern mantels
25 gallon size plastic bags	2 xerox maps of cold creek trail and campsites
1 fishing pole	1 tacklebox w/ salmon eggs & hooks

9/12/93

dr

## **APPENDICES**



**Fires:** Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

**Toilets:** There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.'

**Trash:** Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

**Wildlife:** Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

**Emergency:** The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

-----

**Location of Campsite** "Buck Creek" is located 0.2 miles east of the Little Medano Trail adjacent to an aspen/cottonwood grove. It is the closest backcountry site to a trailhead.

**Number of Sites:** 1

**Distance:** 0.45 miles (0.28 km).

**Elevation/Change:** 8,480 (2561 m); 80' gain (24 m) gain.

**Source of Water:** Buck Creek usually flows year round near the campsite. Treat all water.

**Travel Time:** 20 minutes.

**Features:** This campsite has an outstanding view of the dune mass to the west. It is ideal for families with young children who cannot hike a long distance, but wish to camp in the backcountry. The aspen grove is colorful in the fall, and the sounds of the creek are especially nice.

**Trailhead:** Pinyon Flats Camnaround (Loop 2) or Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2wd vehicles.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: "Escape Dunes" is located 0.1 miles east from the Little Medano Trail in an open grove of ponderosa pine. The park boundary is directly east, and Castle Creek (which flows intermittently) is located just to the south.

Number of Sites: 1

Distance: 1.3 miles (2.1 km).

Elevation/Change: 8,440' (2573 m); 40' (12.2 m) gain.

Source of Water: Castle Creek, just to the south, normally flows from late spring to mid-summer. Medano Creek is 0.5 miles west. Treat all water.

Travel Time: 1/2 hour

Features: This site is adjacent to the Rio Grande National Forest and offers access into rugged, wooded canyons along the park's east boundary. "Escape dunes" are located just south of the campsite. These actively moving dunes formed when sand was blown eastward across Medano Creek in dry years, piling up against the foothills. Ghost forests, (places where dunes have smothered or buried pine trees) can be seen in the vicinity. Surge flow also occurs in Castle Creek.

Trailhead: Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2 wd vehicles.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: The " Indian Grove " site is located 0.2 mile west of the Medano Primitive Road. It lies on a bench, just above Medano Creek. Ponderosa pine, cottonwood and spruce surround the site.

Number of Sites: 1

Distance: 3.1 miles (1.9 km)

Elevation/Change: 8,340' ( 2543 m); 40' (12.2 m) loss

Source of Water: Medano Creek. Treat all water.

Travel Time: 1 1/2 to 2 hours

Features: Just to the north are many ponderosa pine trees with huge scars. These trees were peeled by the Ute Indians during the late 18th to early 20th centuries and utilized for food, medicine, and construction purposes. The inner bark was eaten and contained carbohydrates and important minerals, especially calcium. Trout fishing, close accessibility to the dunes and good views of nearby mountains are added features. Ponderosa pine, cottonwood and spruce surround the site.

Trailhead: Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2-wd vehicles.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: " Little Medano " campsite is located 0.35 miles north of the Medano Primitive Road and just west of the park boundary. It lies in open grasslands and Montane woodlands of ponderosa pine.

Number of Sites: 1

Distance: 3.8 miles (6.1 km)

Elevation/Change: 8,660' (2640 m); 260' (79 m) gain

Source of Water: Medano Creek 0.4 miles south or Little Medano Creek, 0.4 miles north. Treat all water.

Travel Time: 2 hours

Features: Just north rises Mt. Herard (13,297') named after Ulysses Herard who settled and ranched in the Medano Creek area in the late 1870's as a boy. Remains of sawmill operations can be found nearby. A short walk up the dry gully to the west will reveal a beautiful aspen grove. The old Liberty stage coach route crossed Little Medano Creek just to the north, where the trail crosses the stream. Excellent views of Carbonate Peak (12,308'), California Peak (13,849'), and Twin Peaks (13,580') dominate the southern horizon. Elk frequent this area from late fall to early spring.

Trailhead: Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2-wd vehicles. An alternative is to park just outside the East Boundary Gate on Forest Service lands and hike along the road 0.2 miles east to the trail. A 4-wd is required for this trailhead.

**Fires:** Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

**Toilets:** There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

**Trash:** Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

**Wildlife:** Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

**Emergency:** The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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**Location of Camosite:** Southwest of the base of Mt. Herard is the Aspen campsite: about 1.8 miles north of the Sand Creek Trailhead. Open groves of aspen and meadows characterize this site.

**Number of Sites:** 1

**Distance:** 5.3 miles (8.5 km)

**Elevation/Change:** 9,240' (2,817 m); 840' gain (256 m)

**Source of Water:** Little Medano Creek is the closest reliable stream, about 1.3 miles away. Treat all water.

**Travel Time:** 2.5 to 3 hours

**Features:** The widely-spaced aspen trees have thick trunks and are short in stature. This site provides an remarkable vista of the dune mass to the south, snowy peaks northward, and is frequented by elk in the fall and winter. Be sure to explore the valley to the north.

**Trailhead:** Sand Creek Trailhead, or the monument's east boundary are the closest access points by 4-wd. From Point of No Return it is a longer hike and accessible by 2-wd.



Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: The Sand Creek campsite is situated at the end of the Sand Creek Trail (NPS) in an open clearing among tall cottonwoods.

Number of Sites: 1 Distance: 9.8 miles (15.8 km)

Elevation/Chancere: 7,880' (2402 m); 840' (256 m) gain/ 1120' (341 m) loss from highpoint just east of Cold Creek Overlook.

Source of Water: Sand Creek is about 50 yards to the north. Treat all water.

Travel Time: Allow 5 to 7 hours.

Features/Hazards: Located in the bottomlands of Sand Creek the area is heavily forested with cottonwoods and hosts a variety of plants and wildlife unlike the dunes ecosystem. Fishing is generally good here (brook, cutthroat and brown trout). A Colorado State fishing license is required. In the fall elk bugle nearby and bald eagles can be sighted. Respect the private, fenced inholdings to the north and west, and do not trespass. Be sure to set up your tent in the clearing, and not beneath overhanging limbs which may fall unexpectantly, especially during windy periods.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. There are no trees on the dunes - do not carry firewood onto the dunes. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water. In order to expedite the breakdown of feces, leave them on the surface and scatter a handful of sand atop. Temperatures of up to 140 degrees, wind and sun will quickly break down the fecal material. Please pack out all toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Coyotes occasionally cross the dune mass. Do not camp on vegetated areas. They are fragile and inhabited by kangaroo rats, mice and rare insects.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Campsite Locations: You are required to hike west of the top of the main dune mass ridge which borders Medano Creek (see map on reverse) . Your camp should be hidden if possible from this ridge so that day hikers will not see your tent. This is generally a walk of about 1 to 1 1/2 miles. Failure to do so will result in a citation. Backpackers must camp north of a line drawn from Point of No Return to the west to avoid conflict with day users.

Number of Sites: Indefinite                      Distance: Minimal hike of 1 to 1 1/2 miles (1.6 to 2.4 km)

Elevation Change: 600' to 700' (183 m to 213 m) gain with variable loss afterwards.

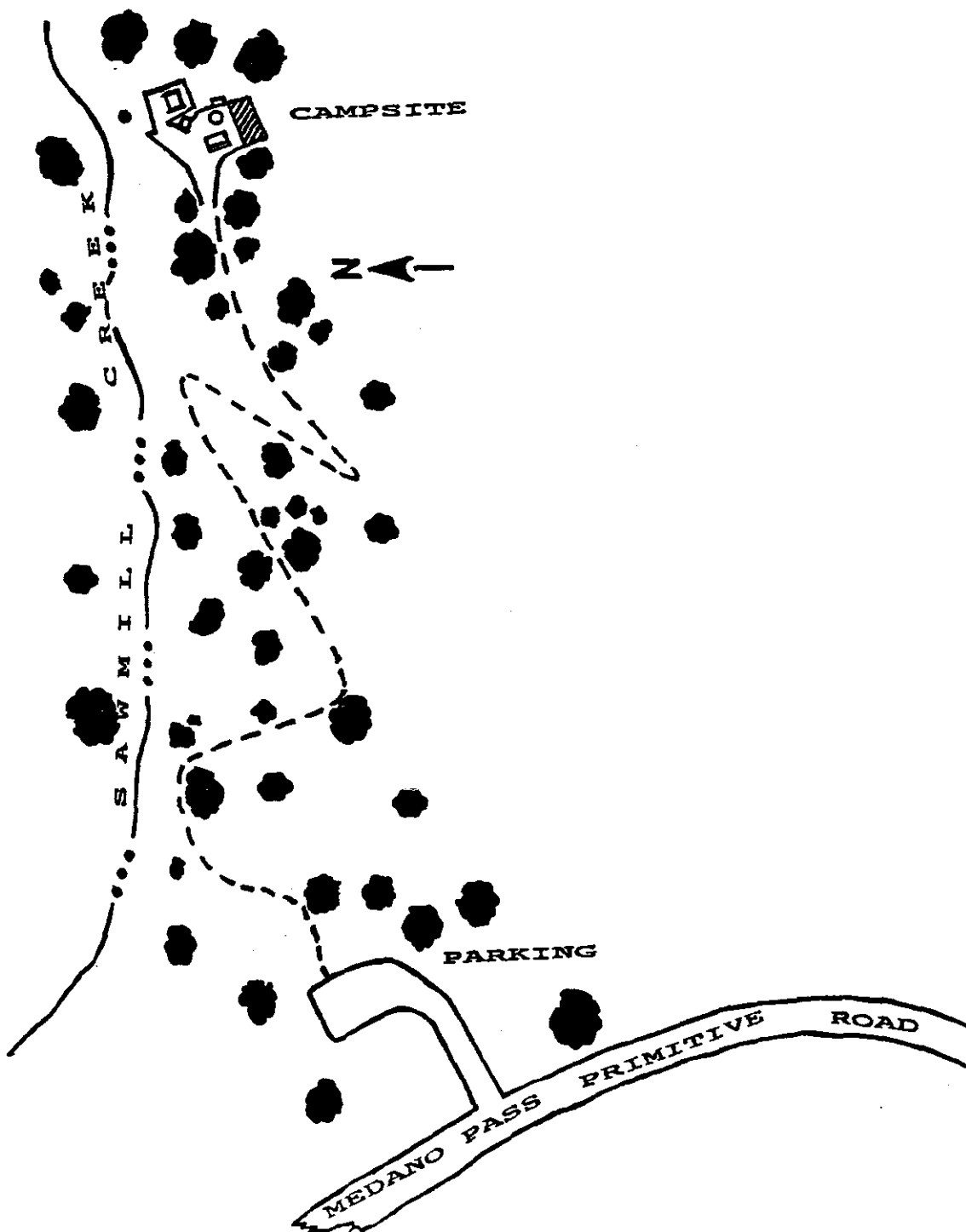
Source of Water: Bring water with you. Take plenty in the summer (min. 1 gallon/person/day).

Travel Time: 1 to 8 hours

Features/Hazards: Over half of all backcountry use permits are for the dunes wilderness. It is a unique and inspiring position to dwell for a night. The harsh dunes ecosystem, apparently devoid of life, contains well-adapted communities of plants and animals. At first glance a place that can seemingly sustain much impact with little damage. Closer examination reveals otherwise.

Extremely fragile communities of Indian rice grass, blowout grass, scurf pea, penstemons, prairie sunflowers and other plants live in

SAWMILL CANYON ACCESSIBLE  
BACKCOUNTRY CAMPSITE



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

BACKCOUNTRY USE PERMIT

The visitor must have this permit during the visit.

When signed, this single-visit permit authorizes.										CAMPSITE NAME		ZONE SITE	NIGHTS
NAME													
ADDRESS													
CITY													
To visit													
Give best estimate of start and finish dates													
FROM MO/DAY													
THROUGH MO/DAY													
Location of entry													
Location of exit													
Primary method of travel													
Number of people in group													
Number of pack or saddle stock													
Number of watercraft or other craft													
REMARKS													
DATE (VISITOR'S SIGNATURE)													
DATE (ISSUING OFFICER'S SIGNATURE)													

GREAT SAND DUNES NATL. MON.

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Lic.No./State \_\_\_\_\_

Date In/Out \_\_\_\_\_

Trailhead \_\_\_\_\_

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## VISITOR REGISTRATION CARD

Completion of this form is voluntary and is not required by law or to obtain a Federal benefit. However, we would appreciate your cooperation in providing us with information about your planned National Forest visit. It will help us plan for future management and protection of this area.

We will enter the proper codes in the shaded blocks.

THANK YOU!

## (13) Travel Plan

If a travel zone map is available, list all zones that you will be traveling through, in sequence, and indicate the number of nights you plan to spend in each zone.

If travel zones are unknown, describe your planned trip by listing campsites, lakes or named landmarks you plan to visit and the number of nights you will spend in each area.

TRAVEL  
ZONE  
CODEN  
I  
G  
H  
T  
S

(1) NAME (Print, include initials, and year)

(2) MAILING ADDRESS (Optional)

(3) CITY AND STATE

(4) ZIP  
CODE

(5) AREA VISITING (Write name of area)

(6) DATES OF VISIT (Give best estimate of  
start and finish dates of your visit)From  
month/dayThrough  
month/day

(7) LOCATION OF ENTRY POINT (Write name of entry point)

(8) LOCATION OF EXIT POINT (Write name of exit point)

(9) PRIMARY METHOD OF TRAVEL (Write method such as hiking, horseback, canoe, etc.)

(10) NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN GROUP

(11) NUMBER OF PACK OR SADDLE STOCK

(12) NUMBER OF WATERCRAFT OR VEHICLES

(14) REMARKS - SUGGESTIONS



**AUTHORIZED OVERNIGHT TRAILHEAD PARKING LIMITS \***

- 1) Amphitheater Parking Lot: 5 vehicles
- 2) Pinyon Flats Campground/Little Medano Trailhead: 4 vehicles
- 3) Point of No Return: 5 vehicles
- 4) Sand Creek Trailhead: 2 vehicles (4-wd only)\*\*
- 5) Montville Nature Trail: 8 vehicles (USFS use)
- 6) Administration Bldg.: Overflow Parking (shuttle)

No overnight parking allowed at Dunes Lot, Day Use areas or along Medano Pass Primitive Road. All cars must display a current dash tag.

\* Memorial Day through Labor Day and busy spring/fall weekends.

\*\* Must park in USFS if lot full from day hikers.

People wishing to access USFS areas and **park in the monument will not be given preference over parking needed by visitors camping in the monument.**

**Backcountry Use Parking Permits**

Jan-March: White  
April: Blue  
May : Yellow  
June: Green  
July:  
August: Green  
September: Yellow  
October: Blue  
Nov-Dec:

**G**

**Saturday**

**N**

**Friday**

**T**

**Thursday**

**W**

**Wednesday**

**M**

**Tuesday**

**A**

**Monday**

**S**

**Sunday**

## **Backcountry** Campsite **Evaluation**

1. Name of Site \_\_\_\_\_ D a t e \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Elevation \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Slope/drainage for tents \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Hazard trees or limbs \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Trenching evidence \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Waste disposal Problems \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  7. Tree Damage (ropes in trees, sawn/chopped limbs, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  8. Out of bounds tent pad evidence \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  9. Erosion Problems (**Soil** Exposure : \_\_\_\_\_)  
(Root Exposure: \_\_\_\_\_)
  10. Wildlife **Problems/History** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  11. Impact from fishing (social trails, waste disposal, etc. ) **or** other activities  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  12. Danger from weather \_\_\_\_\_
  13. Access trail problems \_\_\_\_\_
  14. Vegetative Ground Cover \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Dominant Vegetation List \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Photos (paste on this page, include point taken and direction)

-----  
Map of campsite, indicate north, approximate distances, access trail, social trails, nearest water, dominant vegetation and campsite post locale.



OBSERVATION

Location

Date (Month, Day, Year)	Time (a.m., p.m.)	Weather
-------------------------	-------------------	---------

Description, Behavior, Number, Sketch, Map, Etc. (Use reverse if necessary.)

BE ACCURATE - DO NOT GUESS

Park: Observed by:

SPECIAL ORDER  
RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST

Pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations Sections 261.50(a),(b) when posted, the following is prohibited within 100 yards of each side of the centerline of the Montville Nature Trail and the Wellington Trail within the Conejos Peak Ranger District, Rio Grande National Forest, as depicted on attachment A by cross-hatching. These restrictions are in addition to those enumerated in Subpart A, 36 CFR 261. This order is to eliminate conflict of use and reasons for public health and safety. This order will be in effect until rescinded.


The following is prohibited.

- (1) Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire or stove fire. 36 CFR ~~261.52~~(2)
- (2) Camping. 36 CFR 261.58(e)
- (3) Discharging a firearm, air rifle or gas gun. 36 CFR 261.58(m)
- (4) Hunting. 36 CFR 261.58(v)

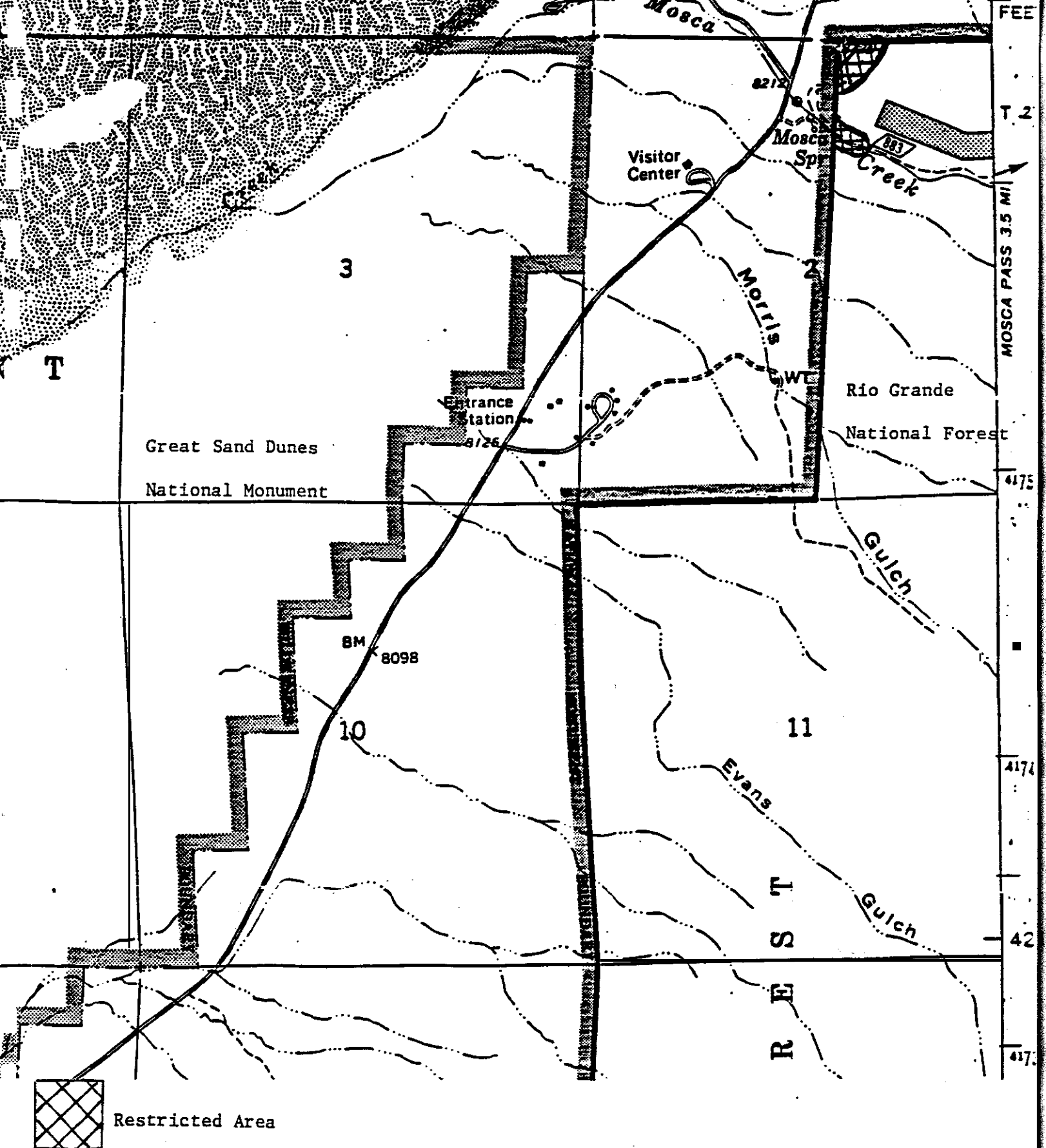
Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following persons are exempted from the order:

- (4) Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force to the performance of an official duty.

Done at Monte Vista this 24 day of June, 1994.

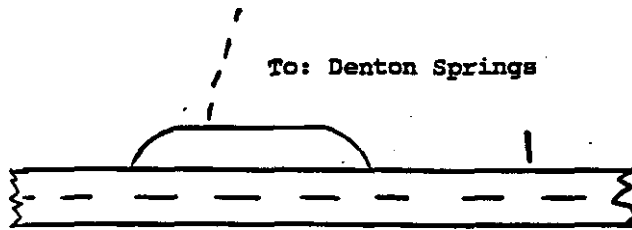
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JAMES B. WEBB  
Forest Supervisor  
Rio Grande National Forest  
Monte Vista, CO 81144

Violation of these regulations is punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000.00 or imprisonment of up to six months or both. 16 USC 551.

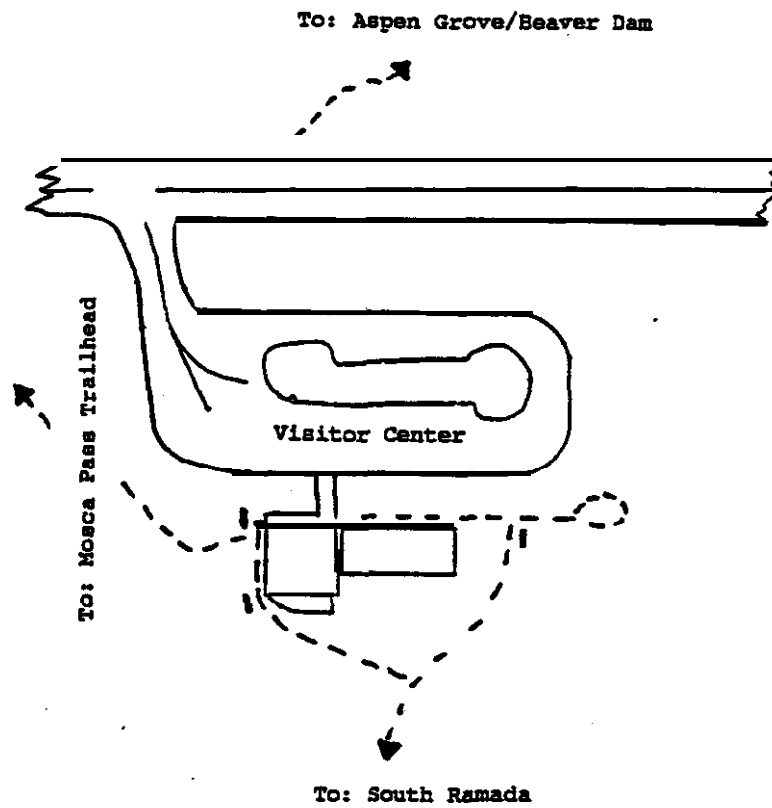


Attachment A

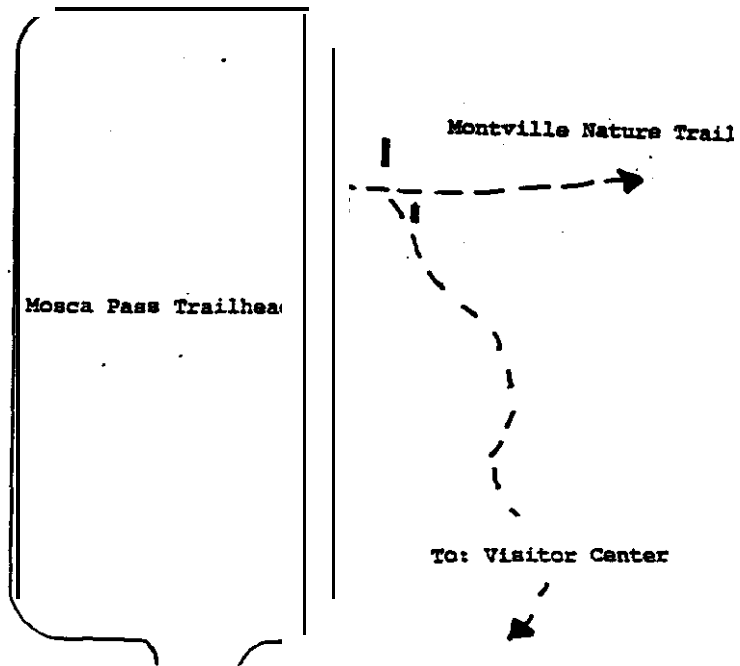
RG-94-20



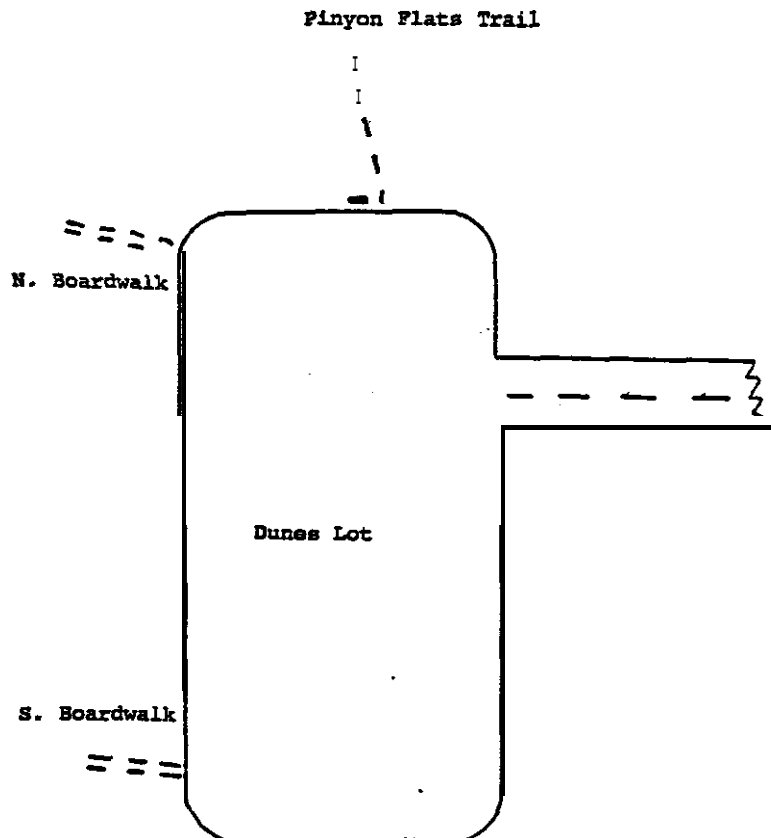
## DENTON SPRINGS TRAILHEAD



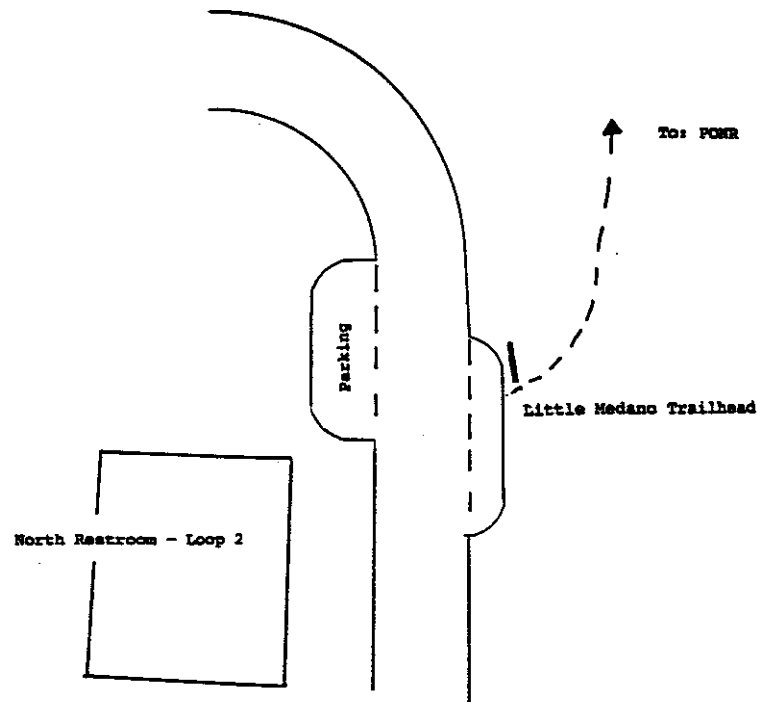
## VISITOR CENTER TRAILS COMPLEX



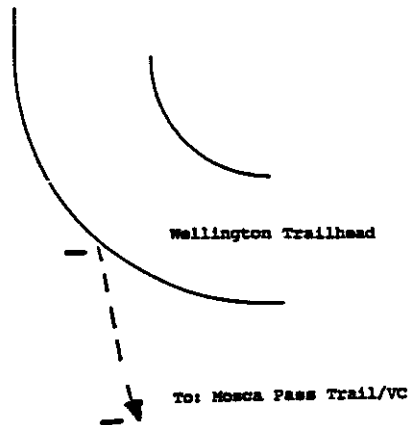
## MOSCA PASS/MONTVILLE NATURE TRAILHEADS



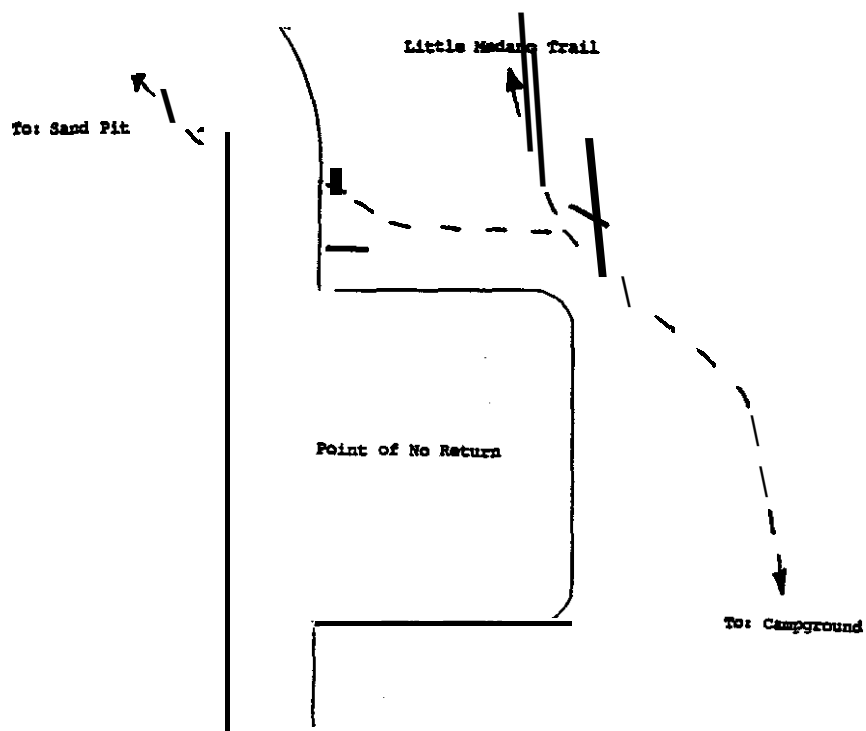
## PINYON FLATS TRAILHEAD



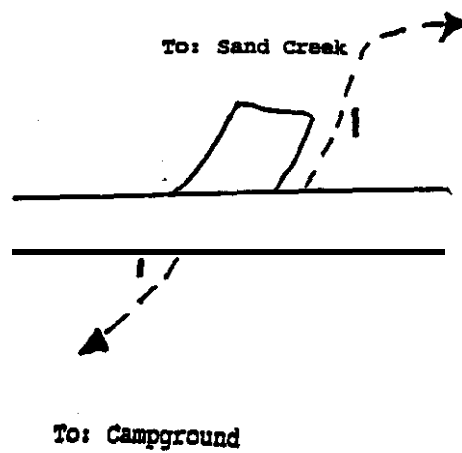
## LITTLE MEDANO TRAILHEAD



## WELLINGTON DITCH TRAILHEAD



## POINT OF NO RETURN TRAILHEAD



## SAND CREEK TRAILHEAD

## TRAIL MILEAGE AT **GREAT** SAND DUNES NATIONAL **MONUMENT**

Mileage is listed from south to north within the monument.  
All monument trails were measured with a 10' circumference wheel.

- 1) Denton Springs Trail: 0.7 miles (1.13 km)
  - 2) Morris Gulch (water tank to east bdy): 0.27 miles (0.44 km)
  - 3) Visitor Center to Corral: 0.47 miles (0.76 km)
  - 4) Beaver Pond area to jct w/ Montville - VC Trail: 0.13 miles (0.21 km)
  - 5) Picture Point Trail: 0.06 miles (0.1 km)
  - 6) Visitor Center to S. Ramada: 0.44 miles (0.71 km)
  - 7) Visitor Center to Montville Trailhead: 0.30 miles (0.5 km)
  - 8) Mosca Pass Trail: 3.5 miles (5.65 km)
  - 9) Montville Nature Trail: 0.48 miles (0.77 km)
  - 10) Wellington Ditch Trail: 0.92 miles (1.48 km)
  - 11) Pinyon Flats Trail: 0.59 miles (0.95 km)
  - 12) Campsround (Loop 2) to Dunes: 0.45 miles (0.73 km)
  - 13) Campground (Loop 2) to PONR: 1.0 miles (1.6 km)
  - 14) Dunes Overlook : 0.5 miles (0.81 km)
  - 15) Sawmill Canyon Handicamp: 0.1 miles (0.16 km)
  - 16) Little Medano Trail: 4.1 miles (6.61 km)
  - 17) Sand Pit Trail: 0.5 miles (0.8 km)
  - 18) Sand Creek Trail: 6.4 miles (10.32 km)
  - 19) Various Connector trails and Spurs: 0.8 miles (1.3 km)
  - 20) Dunes Lot to High Dune: 1.22 miles up(2 km); 1.1 miles down
- Total Park Trail Mileage = 18.21 miles\*
- \* (doesn't include Mosca Pass or high dune(29.4 km)



G R E A T   S A N D   D U N E S   N A T I O N A L  
M O N U M E N T

B A C K C O U N T R Y   M A N A G E M E N T  
P L A N

Submitted by: Stuart W. Schneider Date: 1/20/95  
Chief, Visitor & Resource  
Protection

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Superintendent

# BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

Great Sand Dunes National Monument was established on March 17, 1932 by Presidential Proclamation No. 1994 ". . . for the preservation of the great sand dunes and additional features of scenic, scientific and educational interest. .". To ensure the proper preservation and management of these resources a Resource Management Plan was developed and approved in 1993. This Backcountry Management Plan is brief, and addresses specific concerns regarding present management actions, rather than providing great detail or analysis. It can be utilized as a separate document for operations, training, and familiarization purposes.

### Objectives

The resource protection goals, methods and desired results of managing the natural and cultural resources and the visitor will be briefly covered. A visitor's enjoyment of the resources, including wilderness values, should not cause unnecessary or severe resource damage. This plan should also serve as a guideline for employees to better understand the management of our backcountry and wilderness areas. It should also list management concerns regarding backcountry use.

### Natural Resources

The total acreage of the monument is 38,662 acres, or about 60 square miles, of which 39 square miles are dunes. A variety of habitats exist within the Great Sand Dunes Ecosystem including: bare sand dunes; sparsely to heavily vegetated dunes ; shrub and grasslands (prairie); **pinyon\juniper** forests; open-story, old-age ponderosa forests (previously logged) ; montane woodlands of Douglas and white fir, limber pine, spruce (limited), and aspen; meadows; riparian areas of cottonwood, willow and aspen; and limited wetlands. Wildlife is plentiful including mule deer, elk, pronghorn, coyotes, black bears, mountain lions, various rodents including kangaroo rats, and cottontail rabbits, over 182 species of birds; amphibians and reptiles including the garter snake. Over 850 species of insects occur in the park, of which four beetles are endemic (darkling, tiger and two anthicid) . Air and water quality is considered excellent, and the lack of unnatural sound is evident except for occasional overflights, and vehicle noises from the Medano Primitive Road.

### Cultural Resources

There is a rich history of occupation adjacent to or within the monument from the Folsom culture, Archaic, Anasazi and the Ute. Modern Native American concerns include the Ute, Apache and Northern Pueblo. Occasionally requests for utilizing sand are received as the dunes are considered sacred by some tribes.

Thirty nine archaeological sites are recorded within the monument with more likely to be found. Several of these sites lie along the western boundary where people have driven all- terrain vehicles and illegally removed artifacts. Documentation and increased patrols are needed for these sites. A grove of culturally-scarred ponderosa pines is perhaps the largest stand in North America. It deserves careful management regarding fire, and protection against vandalism. A protection-curation plan needs to be developed for the trees as they die, or approach death.

## **Inholdings**

Five inholdings within the monument total 2,260 acres. One of the inholdings borders the Medano Pass Primitive Road and before the year 2000 will become federal property. The four other tracts of land are in the northwest corner of the monument and contain significant acreage of sand dunes, and valuable riparian sections of Sand Creek. Purchase of these remaining inholdings is highly desirable.

## **WILDERNESS**

### **Boundary**

On October **20, 1976** President Ford signed Public law 94-567 which designated 33,450 acres as wilderness with 670 acres designated as a potential wilderness addition in future years. This plan will guide wilderness management until a separate Wilderness Management Plan is developed. In 1979, as amended by Public Law 96-87, the area for potential wilderness was increased to 2,505 acres. Ninety-three per cent of the monument is either wilderness, or potential wilderness.

In 1993 the **Sangre** de Cristo Wilderness Area was designated within the Rio Grande National Forest. The east and north boundaries of the park are now bordered by forest service wilderness, and provides a compatible management zone for backcountry and wilderness areas within the monument.

### **Access**

Wilderness access is by foot, or horseback. As provided in the Great Sand Dunes wilderness legislation patrol vehicles are still allowed to use the Little Medano Fire Road, and travel along the monument's south and west boundaries. When the access easement for the fire road expires (**1999**), this road will be closed and turned into a hiking trail. Use of the unimproved route along the fenced southern and western boundaries is needed for maintenance, to conduct research, and as access to Sand Creek and other remote areas of the park. Four-wheel drive vehicles with floatation tires, or all terrain vehicles are needed for patrolling this area.

In 1976 the Wilderness Act prohibited vehicles from driving within the wilderness boundary. However, vehicles were still allowed to drive within Medano Creek from Sand Pit to Castle Creek. This route allowed vehicles to bypass an extremely sandy portion of the Medano Pass Primitive Road where four-wheel drive vehicles would often get stuck resulting in congestion and resource damage. **A** wilderness designation map shows the eastern boundary line drawn in the middle of Medano Creek, which included portions of the bypass. In June, 1992 it was temporarily closed due to severe bank erosion (high water due to spring snowmelt), and vehicles getting stuck in the creek bed. After an environmental assessment and public hearings, the bypass was permanently closed in the fall of 1992.

Access exceptions are granted for research provided: 1) the research is essential for the understanding, protection and management of the resources, 2) negligible resource damage results from the research activity, 3) the exception is for a limited

time, and 4) the exception is documented in writing, including justification, length, etc. and receives written approval by the superintendent. Exceptions may also be granted for emergency medical and search and rescue services when life is at risk upon approval by the superintendent, or their designated representative, ie. the Chief Ranger.

## **Signing**

The wilderness boundary as designated has created several operational problems. Because of the midstream boundary line within Medano Creek accurate signing is difficult. Boundary signs must be erected on either bank to prevent their being washed away or destroyed. From an operational standpoint the wilderness boundary will be considered to be the east bank of Medano Creek. Much of the wilderness boundary is unsigned. Portions of the boundary are signed along the Medano Pass Primitive Road, the main park road, and monument boundaries.

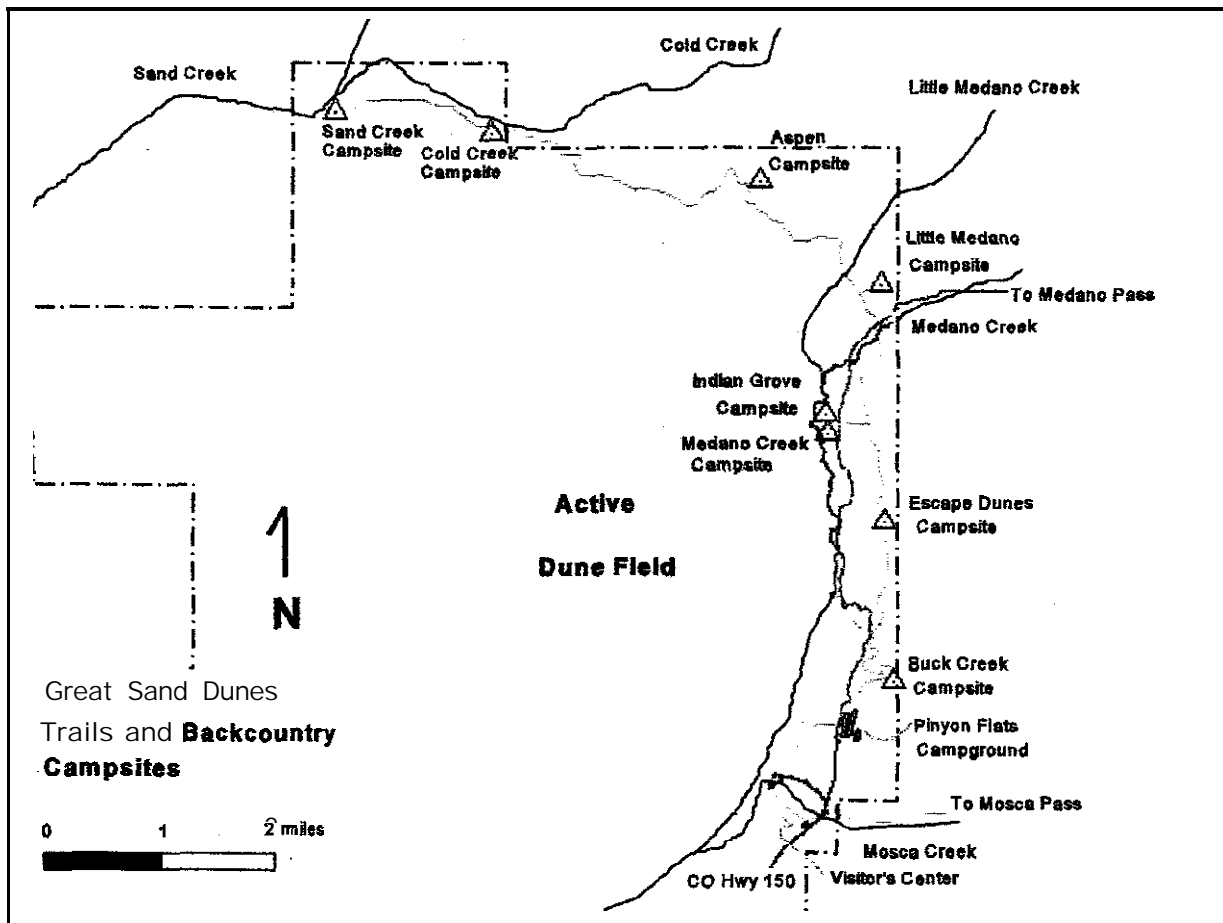
## **Values**

Much of the wilderness at Great Sand Dunes has exceptional wilderness values. However in several portions intense use occurs, and they are managed differently by necessity. The **main** visitor dune use area is within the designated wilderness. This 500 acre area extends northwest from the dunes parking area to the "high dune", then northeast to the Medano Creek streambed at the end of the campground trail. With over a quarter million visitors entering this "wilderness", values like solitude, quiet, and little evidence of human presence are often absent. These values are also lacking near the Sand Pit and Castle Creek Day-Use Areas (primarily on weekends and holidays), and along the main park road (the wilderness boundary is just west of the paved road) due to noise and visibility of traffic on the road. While these areas are part of the designated wilderness, and no motorized vehicles or facilities will be allowed, they will be managed as the intensive visitor use areas they have always been.

## **Threats**

Management concerns involve trespass grazing, cultural resource vandalism, military overflights which threaten natural low ambient sound levels, off-road vehicle use, bear management, poaching, nearby water development prospects, future **mining** threats, and the inability to acquire inholdings with wilderness potential. The monument staff does not perceive visitor day, and overnight use to be a problem at this time. An expansion of the trail and backcountry campsite system in 1994 has occurred to facilitate wilderness access by park visitors.

Portions of the south and western boundary fence are maintained by Medano Ranch staff. The Medano Ranch raises bison. On occasion bison break through park fences. Fences bordering the other inholdings and the **Baca** Grant are often vandalized and down. Cattle trespass still occurs. A solar-powered electric fence encloses wetlands along the west boundary to keep bison out, but elk frequently jump over the fence and short out the system. Increased backcountry patrol of these areas is needed, but budget/staffing limitations and frontcountry workloads make it difficult to carry out these tasks.



## **BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT**

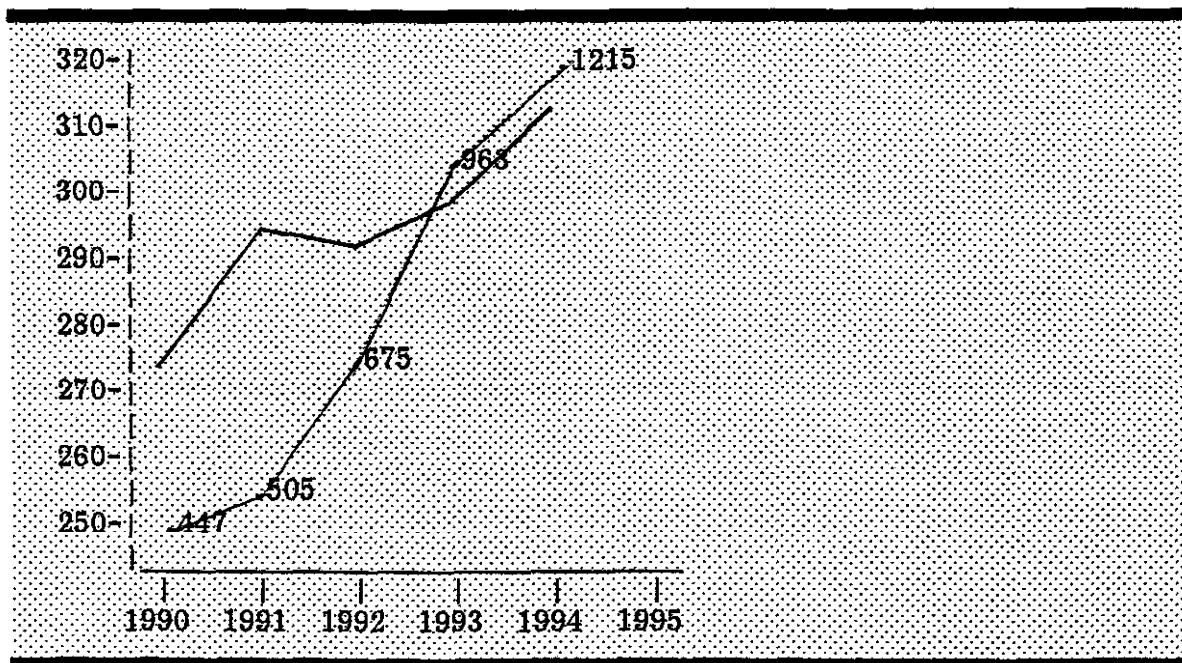
### **Backcountry Permit System -Background**

The backcountry permit system at Great Sand Dunes probably began in the **mid-**1970's. In 1988 four designated sites were accessible along the Medano Pass Primitive Road,. Sand Pit and Castle Creek sites were changed to day-use areas in 1989, leaving only Medano Creek and Indian Grove for campers. By 1993 Escape Dunes and Little Medano were added, and in 1994 five more sites were created, including an accessible camp with a hardened trail in Sawmill Canyon. The camp was not opened in 1994 due to a back-ordered toilet.

### **Procedures - Statistics**

Permits are required for all overnight stays in the wilderness and in designated campsites. They are issued free of charge at the visitor center, or on occasion by field rangers. Dash tags are required for overnight parking in the monument to access adjacent forest service lands -- permits are optional. Many visitors register for Mosca Canyon, and other nearby areas. Permits are sent to the Rio Grande National Forest yearly. Camping statistics are compiled annually for backcountry, and forest use, but none for day hikers. Installation of **trail** counters or registers would be desirable.

Most backcountry use occurs April through September. Since 1992 permits issued have increased 89%. In 1993 56% of all permits were for dunes wilderness camping; in 1994 it dropped to 39%. About 100 USFS permits are issued yearly. Visitation in 1994 was over 312,00 with use increasing in spring and fall. (See graph below - drop due partly to persons per vehicle count change).



**Annual Visitation (blue, in thousands) vs. Backcountry User Nights (red, Actual) at Great Sand Dunes National Monument**

## Trails

At present there are over 18 miles of established trails, eight backcountry campsites, one accessible camp, and 5.2 miles of four-wheel public accessible roads within the monument. In the wilderness portion of the backcountry are about 18 miles of unimproved roads, three backcountry campsites, one ranger camp and 7.1 miles of trail.

A trails map is being revised for 1995. Individual site maps for each backcountry campsite, a handout for dune mass users, and a backcountry camping handout were created in 1994. The park color brochure needs to be updated to include additional **trails**, text changes and mark campsites if so desired.

Trailheads should provide a set number of parking spaces, be uniformly marked with standard signs: routed, stained wood signs with white letters; no bicycles, horses (if allowed), and pets on leash (3-M).

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In general five types of **trails** exist within the monument:

Class One: Paved or hardened surface trails with no set width or grade. Many of these trails are for physically challenged visitors and do have set standards in slope, width, surface, resting spots, turnarounds, etc. This would include boardwalks, and the **handicamp**, access to restrooms, etc.

**Class** Two: Gravel trails three to five feet in width, various gradients. Examples are campground trails, and sections of trails around the visitor center, or trailheads.

Class Three: Natural surface trails three to five feet in width; usually frontcountry. The Little Medano Trail from PONR to Pinyon Flats Campground, Pinyon Flats Trail, etc.

**Class** Four: Either frontcountry or backcountry trails, natural surface, with normal improvements (waterbars, steps, bridges, trimming) one to three feet in width.

Class Five: Primitive routes, or trails with minimal improvements and markings.

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Social **trails** are evident especially in the campground, along the Pinyon Flats trail and the Medano Pass Primitive Road between its **beginning** and Buck Creek; at trailheads, and within backcountry sites. Cutting switchbacks is a problem in some areas. There is a need for increased trail maintenance mostly due to natural erosion and plant invasion. Visitor and Resource Protection personnel perform most trail maintenance; volunteer groups and park staff are used on occasion for special projects, or cyclical maintenance.



## **Camping**

There are several types of camping experiences within and adjacent to the monument. Most park visitors stay at the Pinyon Flats Campground, which is a frontcountry fee campground with running water, flush toilets, fire grates, and limited concession items. Right backcountry sites provide a marked, destination type of experience accessible by trail (or a short walk from roads in some situations) .

Wilderness camping can be experienced on the dunes, or in other park environs within a designated area. (See Reference Map in Appendices) **Trails** and roads can provide initial access to some of these areas, but soon trails cease to exist and the hiker relies on their own orienteering skills. Wilderness trail and non-trail hiking is also available in United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands surrounding the monument. Car camping is available along the Medano Pass Primitive Road on National Forest lands where vehicles can pull off the road and pitch a tent, and build a fire.

A wheelchair accessible backcountry camp was constructed in 1994 adjacent to Sawmill Creek. It is available by reservation. The parking area can accommodate 2 vehicles. The trail surface was hardened with a "stabilizer" substance. Most of the construction was completed by hand using park personnel and some volunteer work: (Telephone Pioneers, Boy Scouts of America, and court-ordered community service. ) The camp was partly funded by the National Park Foundation. Maximum grade for the 0.1 mile trail is six per cent with most sections two to four per cent. A modified picnic table, elevated grill, elevated tent pad, composting toilet, and metal food/wood storage containers denote the campsite.

1. Have visitor fill out first three lines and vehicle description information. Please print!
2. Ask what kind of camping they wish to experience, or where they want to go.. Describe opportunities in the monument and assist them in their choice if needed.
3. Fill out the entire left side of the permit (see copy). Include horse information if appropriate. Write campsite name(s) on lines at upper right side, and number of nights. Write where vehicle will be parked \*.
4. Read the regulations on the sheet to them out loud. Write "REGS" on comments line.
5. Ask them to date and sign on the visitor's signature line. Say "By \_\_\_\_\_ this line you agree to abide by the regulations of this permit." A park ranaer should date/sign the permit.
6. Give them the hard copy, ask them to attach it to their pack while walking, and a tent while at the site. They DO NOT need to check back in. The park does not accept any responsibility for their well-being.
7. Fill out the correct colored month parking permit--have them place it on the dash.
8. Give them the free map handout, & site sheet.
9. If they are camping in the USFS, fill out the yellow card, and give them a dash tag.
10. Put the pink copy on the clip board and write in the party name and number of users on the master log sheet.
11. Place the white copy (or USFS card) in the In-Box of the law enforcement ranger division.

IMPORTANT!!!

Horses and llamas are allowed to camp in the wilderness areas of the monument. Weed-free hay or pellets must be brought in for feed.

\* Parking within the monument is allowed only at Montville T.H., the amphitheater lot, and Point of No Return. At times (some holidays) vehicle numbers (and therefore visitor numbers) will be limited. Overflow parking is available at the HQ parking lot if the other lots fill their quota (5 cars/lot)

## BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING REGULATIONS

- 1) Camp at designated sites only. (Main Dune Mass campers must camp over the first crest line, out of sight of day users).
- 2) Park vehicles overnight in permitted areas only.
- 3) Use gas stoves. Open fires are prohibited.
- 4) Pets are allowed on leashes (maximum 6'). Be aware that summer sand can burn their footpads.
- 5) Pack out all trash.
- 6) One party per site with a maximum of 6 people.
- 7) Water is limited or nonexistent. Treat all backcountry water sources. Ticks are present usually from April through June.
- 8) Camp within a 50' radius of the brown metal arrowhead on a post.
- 9) Bury human waste at least 6 " deep.

Failure to obey these rules will **result:** in fines/citations.

## Hiking

There are no statistics on hiking use within the monument. The majority of park visitors hike **along** Medano Creek, to the base of the dunes and to the summit of the high eastern dune. A large number **also** hike from the campground to the creek and dunes, and up the Mosca Pass **trail**. There are no **trail** counters at this time. **Installing** voluntary registration boxes at **trailheads** is being considered for 1995. Research strategy planning has identified a need to study biker impact on the corridor from the dunes lot area to the high ridge concerning plants and insect **life**. A summit register was **installed** on the high eastern dune in February, 1995.

From 1992 to 1994 **trails** and campsites were plotted using a GPS unit. A comprehensive map is being developed. The **following** is a list of **trails within** the monument with accurate mileages :

<u>Number/Name of Trail</u>	<u>Distance</u>	<u>Class &amp; Use</u>
1) <b>Montville</b> Nature <b>Trail</b>	0.5 mi.	3, moderate
2) <b>Wellington</b> Ditch <b>Trail</b>	0.9 mi.	3, moderate
3) Visitor Center to <b>Montville</b>	0.3 mi.	4, very light
4) <b>Pinyon Flats</b> <b>Trail</b>	0.6 mi.	3, <b>light</b>
5) Visitor Center to Dunes	0.4 mi.	4, light
6) Little Medano <b>Trail</b>	5.1 mi.	3 & 4, moderate
7) Sand Pit <b>Trail</b>	0.5 Dli.	4, moderate
8) Sand Creek <b>Trail</b>	6.4 mi.	5, very light
9) Dunes Overlook <b>Trail</b>	0.5 mi.	3, moderate
10) <b>Denton</b> Springs <b>Trail</b>	0.7 mi.	4, very light
11) Various Connector <b>Trails</b>	1.2 mi.	4, <b>light</b>
12) Campground to Dunes	0.5 mi.	3, <b>heavy</b>
13) Mosca Pass <b>Trail</b>	3.5 mi.*	4, moderate
14) Barn to Visitor Center	0.5 mi.	4, <b>light</b>
15) Picture Point <b>Trail</b>	0.1 <b>mi.</b>	1, heavy
16) <b>Sawmill</b> Canyon	0.1 mi.	1, light

\* not included in **total** mileage

There are 18.21 **miles** of established **trails** within the monument. The **walk** to the high eastern dune is about 1.22 **miles** if ridges are **followed** in the most direct path. Returning straight down to the dunes lot is about 1.1 **miles**.

# Great Sand Dunes

National Park Service  
11500 Highway 150  
Mosca, Colorado 81146  
719-378-2312

Hike the dune mass,  
the pinon-juniper forest,  
or upland into the mountains.  
Discover this unique resource yourself. . .

## HIKING OPPORTUNITIES

### MAIN DUNE MASS

Wander where you please on the dunes—there are no established trails in the sand. Wear shoes—in summer, surface temperatures can reach 140°F! Take water and sunscreen; a jacket is advisable. When storm clouds roll in, GET OFF THE DUNES; lightning is a danger on the vast dune expanses.

A climb to the top of the tallest dune (about 700 feet from the base) takes about one hour; from the top gaze upon miles of picturesque peaks and slipfaces.

In spring, frolic in Medano Creek (generally flowing April through June). Observe the water pulse in surges or “waves” in the creekbed, a unique, fascinating phenomena.

Traverse the dunes at night. On a moonlit and star-filled night, watch closely for the giant sand treader camel cricket or the Great Sand Dunes tiger beetle in the sand. Both insects are found nowhere else in the world!

### ACCESS TRAILS TO MAIN DUNE MASS

Hike the dunes from the dunes parking area or from two foot trails: one trail originates at the Visitor Center and the other at the campground near the entrance to Medano Pass Primitive Road. In the campground, you may access this trail near campsite 34.

### PICTURE POINT TRAIL

A few strides along Picture Point Trail at the Visitor Center lends itself to several scenic stops; take your camera along. (Wheelchair negotiable.)

### PINYON FLATS TRAIL (3/4 MILE ONE WAY)

Walk the Pinyon Flats Trail through grasslands near the base of the dunes. The trail connects the campground with the dunes parking area and picnic area.

### MONTVILLE NATURE TRAIL

(1/2 MILE AROUND LOOP)

Take a self-guided hike on the Montville Nature Trail that circles the lower portion of Mosca Canyon. Using the guide available at the trailhead for a nominal fee, learn the natural features and colorful early history of Mosca Pass. Pause along Mosca Creek; it is a shady oasis on hot, summer days. Spectacular views of the dunes can be seen from high points along the trail.

## **Driving/ Biking**

Driving in the backcountry is available along 5.2 miles of rough, sandy roads from the campground to the east boundary where the Medano Pass Primitive Road enters forest service lands. The first mile is accessible to two-wheel drive vehicles except during winter when snow and ice often make it impassable. The remaining portion of the road is often closed at the park boundary, or at Castle Creek due to drifting snow. There is one creek crossing at Shockey's Crossing which often causes difficulties to motorists during periods of high **runnoff**. Vehicles **occassionally** become stranded in the crossing. Several more crossings on Forest Service Lands cause considerable difficulty and damage to vehicles.

Off-road vehicle use is a continual problem along the Medano Pass Primitive Road. Certain problem areas have fencing, cables and posts, posts, or logs to help prevent driving off-road. Unlicensed vehicles (dune buggies, modified vehicles, dirt bikes and all terrain vehicles) and two-wheel drive vehicles continue to use the road as well. Visitors are usually cited when contacted.

Mountain bikes can travel on this road when it is wet (firm sand) or frozen. With much snow, or drier conditions the road is impassable to bikes. Bikes are prohibited on all park trails. Mountain bike tracks are frequently found on some trails (Wellington Ditch, Campground to Dunes), and along Medano Creek between the Sand Pit and the Dunes Lot.

# GUIDE TO MEDANO PASS PRIMITIVE ROAD

<u>Location</u>	<u>Mileage</u>	<u>Comments</u>
End of Paved Road	0.0	Begin Primitive Road
Garden Creek	0.2	Flows until mid-summer
Buck Creek	0.5	
Sawmill Creek	1.0	Flows until mid-summer
Point of No Return	1.1	Trailhead, 4-wd only beyond
Ponderosa Point	1.4	Picnic Area
Sand Pit	1.8	Day use only, picnic tables
Castle Creek	2.6	Day use only, picnic tables
Horse Canyon Crossing	3.3	
Medano Cr. Campsite	3.8	Obtain a backcountry permit
Indian Grove Campsite	4.0	Obtain a backcountry permit
Shockey's Crossing	4.5	Use caution in high water
Fire Road	4.6	Foot traffic allowed
Little Medano Trail	5.0	Hiking access to northern dunes and Sand Creek
Monument Boundary	5.2	USFS Route #235
Medano Creek crossing	5.6	Tough mud hole across creek
Road Spur	5.9	Meadows beyond
Medano Creek crossing	6.1	4th time
Frenchman's Cabin	6.2	Old Herard homestead, 1875
Medano Creek crossing	6.4	
Medano Creek crossing	6.8	
Cliff to left	6.9	Good campsites just ahead
Tight squeeze	7.5	Boulders along road
Medano Creek crossing	7.6~	
Creek crossing	7.7	
Road spur to north	7.7	
Three Alternatives	7.8	Middle way usually best
Medano Creek crossing	7.9	Road gets steeper
Spur to north	8.4	Pinnacles, and cliffs
Creek crossing	8.6	
Beaver Dams	8.8	Long meadows
Three Cabins	9.0	
Road to north	9.3	
Medano Creek crossing	9.6	Left fork of road (u) best
Meadows	10.0	
Creek crossing	10.8	
Medano Lake T.H.	10.7	Trailhead 1/2 mile, lake 2.5
Ditch	11.0	Steep ahead
Medano Pass	11.2	10,040
Viewpoint	11.3	Turn left uphill, mtn. views

The new Sanare de Cristo Wilderness preserves 226,455 acres of the Rio Grande and San Isabel National Forests and BLM lands too. Vehicles must stay on established roads - no off-road driving. Dogs must be leashed, or under control (voice, etc.) at all times. Only dead and down trees may be cut for cooking' fires while camping. Pack out all trash. Use a stove wherever possible. Camp at least 100' from roads or water. Keep party sizes small to reduce impact.

## BEAR MANAGEMENT

In past years bear encounters vary widely, mostly occurring in frontcountry areas (residents, picnic area, dumpster, etc. ) but increased bear sightings and activity show that backcountry users must be wisely educated concerning proper food storage and waste disposal. Each backcountry campsite handout mentions hanging food. A free pamphlet on bears is available to campers, and when bear activity is **occurring**, backcountry campers are warned. Bears have rarely raided backcountry campsites, and visitors have not reported any serious encounters.

Rangers have used rubber slugs, sirens and noise-making devices to discourage problem bears from seeking garbage. Evening trash collection, fencing/closing the dumpster, and signing have helped reduce bear sightings and dependence on human food and garbage. Bear-proof cans will help alleviate bears from seeking food from humans and eventually reduce conflict with backcountry users by non-association.

## Emergency Services

A Search and Rescue Plan exists for the monument. **Occassionally** these activities occur in the backcountry. Training is held several times a year for park staff and valley rescue groups. No technical rescues are recorded in past history. The potential does exist as some rock climbing occurs within, or adjacent to the monument, and ice climbing is present in nearby areas where park staff may be called to help Alamosa or Saguache counties, or other government agencies in the event of a lost person, or injured climber. Limited park equipment exists. Plans are underway to obtain a wheel for our litter, and rigging for technical lowers. Winter use is light, as snow depth is usually marginal for skiing. Sledding on the **dunes** presents the possibility of serious injury as steep dunes often end (flatten-out) abruptly.

## STOCK USE

All pack animals (horses, mules, llamas, goats, etc. ) are allowed anywhere in the park except frontcountry, high visitor-use areas. This essentially prohibits their use on all trails except the Little Medano Trail north from Point of No Return, the Sand Creek Trail, the trail from Point of No Return to the Sand Pit, and the Mosca Pass Trail. They may cross roads to gain access to these trails **or** permissible backcountry areas. A handout on horse use is given to vehicles with trailers at the Entrance Station. Horses may be used by individual hunters to pack supplies through the monument for private hunting camps outside the park, **but weapons and ammunition may not be packed through the monument**. Legally taken game may be packed on horses through the monument if it is covered, and tagged properly. A ranger must be notified.

The need for established stock camps along the trail system is a possibility in future years. As of 1994 it would be easy for stock trips to camp in the USFS Cold Creek drainage.



## RESEARCH NEEDS

Monitoring of backcountry campsites was begun in 1994 and will continue indefinitely in order to measure how visitors affect campsites, vegetation, soils, etc. (An evaluation form is included in the appendices). Trails and other necessary areas or sites (**archaeological** sites, social trails, etc. ) should be evaluated as needed. Several other needed **research** projects specific to the Research Management Division include :

- 1) Fire **History** & Post-Fire Monitoring: a wildfire plan is expected to be completed in 1995 which will determine **supression** activities and prescribed burning methods to manage the culturally scarred ponderosa pine trees, or other habitats.
- 2) Complete **Documentation** of **Culturally-Scarred** Ponderosa Pines: need to locate, interpret, protect and manage individual trees or groves.
- 3) Document & **Inventory Archaeological** Sites: to protect these sites many must be relocated; most of the park has not been surveyed.
- 4) VERP Studies: should be considered, especially in the crowded dunes lot to high dune area. Surveying backcountry users (day and overnight) would provide useful information to better manage the backcountry.
- 5) Vegetation & Wildlife **Monitoring**: baseline data should be gathered and a monitoring program instigated. Do park visitors affect these resources? Can proactive resource management be utilized in response to external or internal threats, population fluctuations, etc. ?
- 6) Day-use **impact** in the main dunes visitor use corridor: its **afects** on fragile dune plants, & animals (including insect life and behavior).

All of these research needs affect backcountry management in a variety of ways. Currently data about, geology, sand movement, water quality, hydrology, air quality, & sound monitoring are being conducted. The Resource Management Plan and Resource Management Strategy covers most of these concerns in more **detail**.

## **EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION**

One of the primary goals in backcountry management is to conserve park resources as much **as** possible, yet still provide for use by visitors. Educating the visitor, and interpreting the monument's resources is essential for success in accomplishing this difficult task.. Interpretive programs should help the visitor to understand the purpose of the monument, and the National Park Service, and how these working philosophies guide backcountry management decisions.

In order to conserve and protect the monument's resources, visitors should gain knowledge through **media** and interpretive processes to:

- 1) learn about the Great Sand Dunes ecosystem and its various components
- 2) grow to appreciate these resources
- 3) acquire or strengthen their conservation ethic
- 4) access information on backcountry camping, low-impact use methods, hiking, riding, hunting, safety, and other activities or uses.

Methods to accomplish these tasks should be derived by division cooperation and be evident in evening programs, **community/school** outreach programs, the park newspaper, bulletin boards, handouts, construction & maintenance activities, roving contacts, walks and talks, and at information centers.

## PATROL GUIDELINES

A position description under Backcountry Ranger Position Duties explains the duties of a backcountry ranger, or a frontcountry ranger on bc patrol. Common duties and **problems** are noted. Communication of various subjects is necessary to convey needed information to the visitor including **route-finding/orienteering**, safety issues, pet policies, giardia which is present in waters of the monument, ticks and associated fevers, biting insects, food storage/bear problems, proper waste disposal, feeding wildlife, gathering of nuts and berries (esp. **pinyon** nuts), weather, high water crossings, driving in sand, horse etiquette, walking on vegetated dune areas, and many other issues.

Common violations in the backcountry are : no permit, fires, camped in undesignated area, cutting switchbacks, dogs off leash, theft of archaeological resources, **off-road** vehicles, alcohol and open container violations, hunting, littering, and destruction of natural resources. Violation statistics are compiled yearly, but backcountry statistics have not been separated from overall statistics.

Coverage of the Medano Primitive Road should occur at least two to three times daily during the **main** season of visitation. Some days less patrols are done because of reduced use, or other responsibilities. The backcountry sites should be checked frequently, and the Sand **Creek** trail backcountry sites at least every 1 or 2 weeks. Weekends require visits to these areas.

## DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GRSA BACKCOUNTRY RANGER (GS-4, 5)

1. Enforces federal & state laws, CFR, etc. Gives verbal & written **warnings**, issues citations, makes arrests, testifies in court.. Includes **PC patrol** duties as scheduled.
2. Primary care provider for three horses:
  - feeding, **grooming**, care
  - transport, vet needs
  - record keeping (horse files, riding, vet)
  - **clean barn**, stalls, **corral**, water trough, etc.
  - ensure others are doing **chores**
  - receive training, train others
  - make **minor fence** and **tack** repairs
  - **maintain saddles**, tack
  - purchase needed supplies (medical, grain, hay)
  - Ride when scheduled to **backcountry**
3. Patrols/inspects **Medano Rd.** accessible backcountry sites daily (mom or eve) by foot or **horse**: Buck Cr., Sawmill Canyon, Sand Pit Day Use Area, Castle Creek Day Use Area, **Escape Dunes**, **Medano Cr.**, Indian grove, Little **Medano**.
4. Ride or bike to **Sand Creek Ranger Camp** at least 1/pay period (**every** two weeks) , via **Sand Creek Trail**. Drive or take **ATV** from S. boundary far day trip atleast 1x eaah 2 weeks. Inspect boundary archaalogioal sites every 2 weeks.
5. Maintains Trails and campsites:
  - trim branches
  - chop **grass**, exotics
  - knock **rxs.** off trail
  - **hazard** trees
  - water bars, steps
  - trash
  - maintain signs (paint, bolts, inventory, **add/remove**)
  - **check/repair bridges**.
  - oordinate work w/ Rds. & Trails Work Leader
  - Restoration work (logs, rxs, campfires, vandalism, **excelsor** blankets, **seeding**, **social trails**,etc.)
  - monitor sites
6. Disseminates camping and hiking **information** in field, issues permits **through** Dispatch.
7. Assists in **training** park staff in **bc** operations **when possible**.
8. **Maintains**, updates **BC** drawer (dash tags, **xerox** copies), **information** at **VC**.
9. Compiles monthly stats for year-end **l.e.** report.

10. Assists Resource **Management Division** w/ projects as needed (flumes, transects, sand traps, **GPS**, etc.)
11. **Maintains** physiaal fitness.
12. Assists in **SAR** and **EMS** operations.
13. **Maintains proficiency** in wildfire supression.
14. Checks boundaries of park as assigned. Add signs where needed, repair fences, gates, add **carsonite** boundary markers, proficient w/ map and compass, assist w/ **GPS**.
15. Prepares daily BC patrol reports, **CIR's**, etc.
16. Completes wildlife **observation cards**.
17. Performs adequate hunting patrol as assigned.

BACKCOUNTRY PATROL REPORT

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Hiles patrolled: \_\_\_\_\_ Foot \_\_\_\_\_ Ski \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Norse \_\_\_\_\_ 4wd \_\_\_\_\_

Destination \_\_\_\_\_

Shift \_\_\_\_\_ Trailhead (Start/Finish) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Accomplished: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Work Needed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Wildlife Sightings: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Visitor Contacts \_\_\_\_\_ Backcountry permits Checked \_\_\_\_\_  
(Roving \_\_\_\_\_)

Other/Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Verbal. Warnings \_\_\_\_\_

Written Warnings \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Citations P# \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

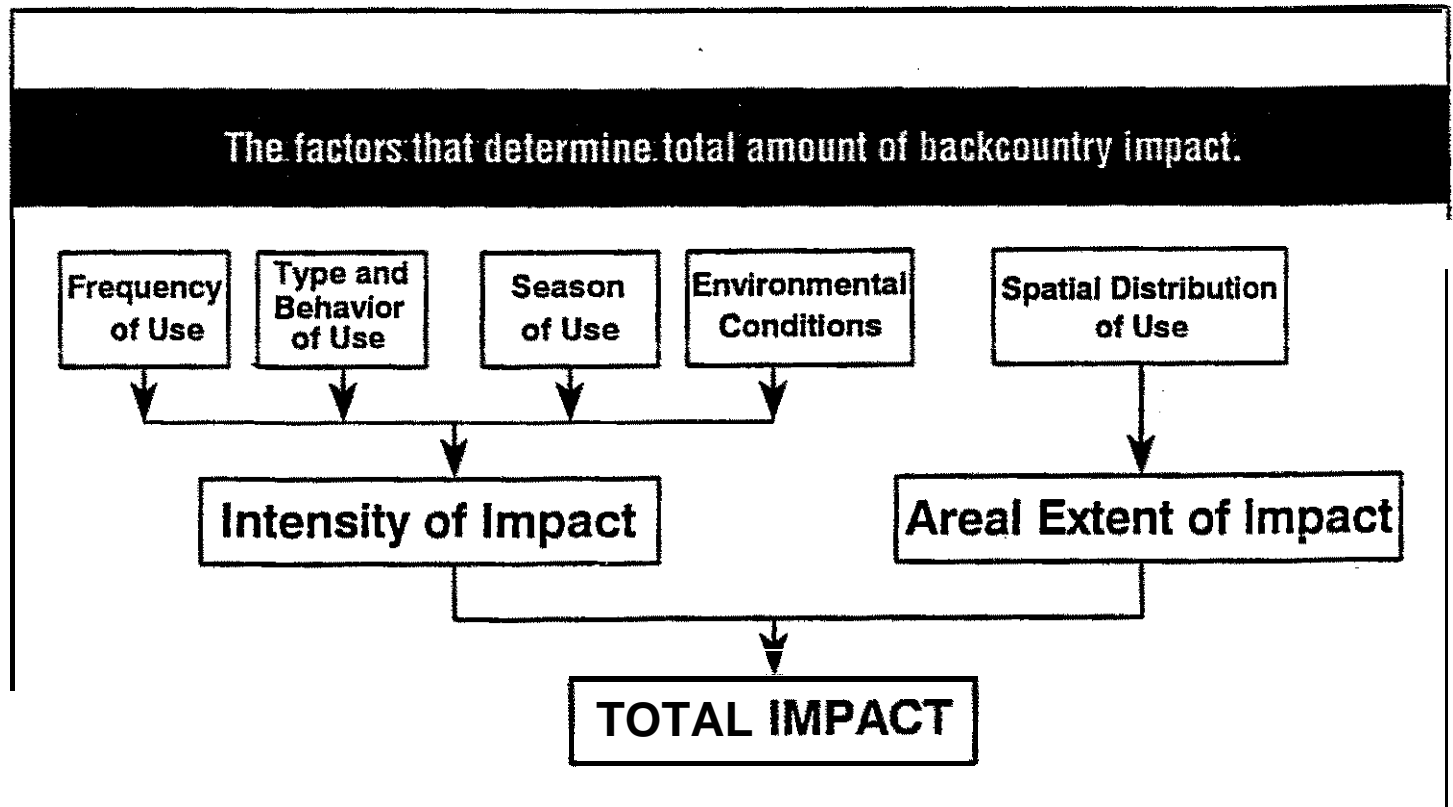
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## RESOURCE MONITORING

**Campsites** should be evaluated yearly for hazard trees and loose limbs which **hang** over tent sites. Waste disposal should be investigated (look under rocks, **too close** to water, **etc.**) to ensure that **excess** waste is not yet a problem. Impact on vegetation (tent impact, firewood gathering, etc.) **should** be noted and recorded. Frequency of campsite use will be recorded for the **year** (permits), no-shows **or** leaving early should be corrected at the **VC**. Erosion, Litter, signing, fire rings and other **problems/violations** should be **noted**. A monitoring sheet (enclosed) should be used yearly to note **changes** in the site. Photographs should be taken every year **initially**.

In the future it would be helpful to survey visitor use to gain **an** understanding of their impact, needs, activities and comments on the present system. **Day** use & overnight use should be evaluated to determine their impact on park resources by an approved method. Backcountry impact could be **evaluated** using the flow chart shown below.

(See appendices for "**Backcountry** Campsite **Evaluation Form**" and "**Wildlife** Observation **Cards**")



## **SAND CREEK RANGER CAMP**

A ranger patrol camp is located on Sand Creek in the northwestern corner of the monument. It consists of a wood frame (**w/** floor) and canvas outfitter% tent, picnic table, toilet, fire grate, corral, storage boxes and two sheds. A stove, lantern, wok kit, wildfire pack and gear, 4 sleeping bags, pads, dome tent, axe, shovel and other tools, etc. are available. The tent sleeps four people comfortably on cots (could hold up to 6 people), and if more bags are taken the camp will accommodate at least 8 people (2 more in the backpacking tent). A bear bag/cable **is** present and should be utilized. An annual inventory should be completed.

During the summer season a ranger is scheduled to be there on a weekly basis if at all possible. Other divisions (Resource Management, Interpretation, Maintenance and Administration) are encouraged to utilize the camp during work projects, or lieu days. The camp receives more patrol use on holidays and during hunting **season**.

Fishing is generally good from June through mid-September. The horse corral can hold several horses overnight. Hay, grain and grooming supplies are located in sheds, but grain may need to be packed **in** due to bears raiding the grain can. The camp toilet should be moved to various locales as each hole becomes full. A future composting toilet should be purchased when funds become available. A wood stove was added in 1994 to heat the tent in cold weather (hunting season).



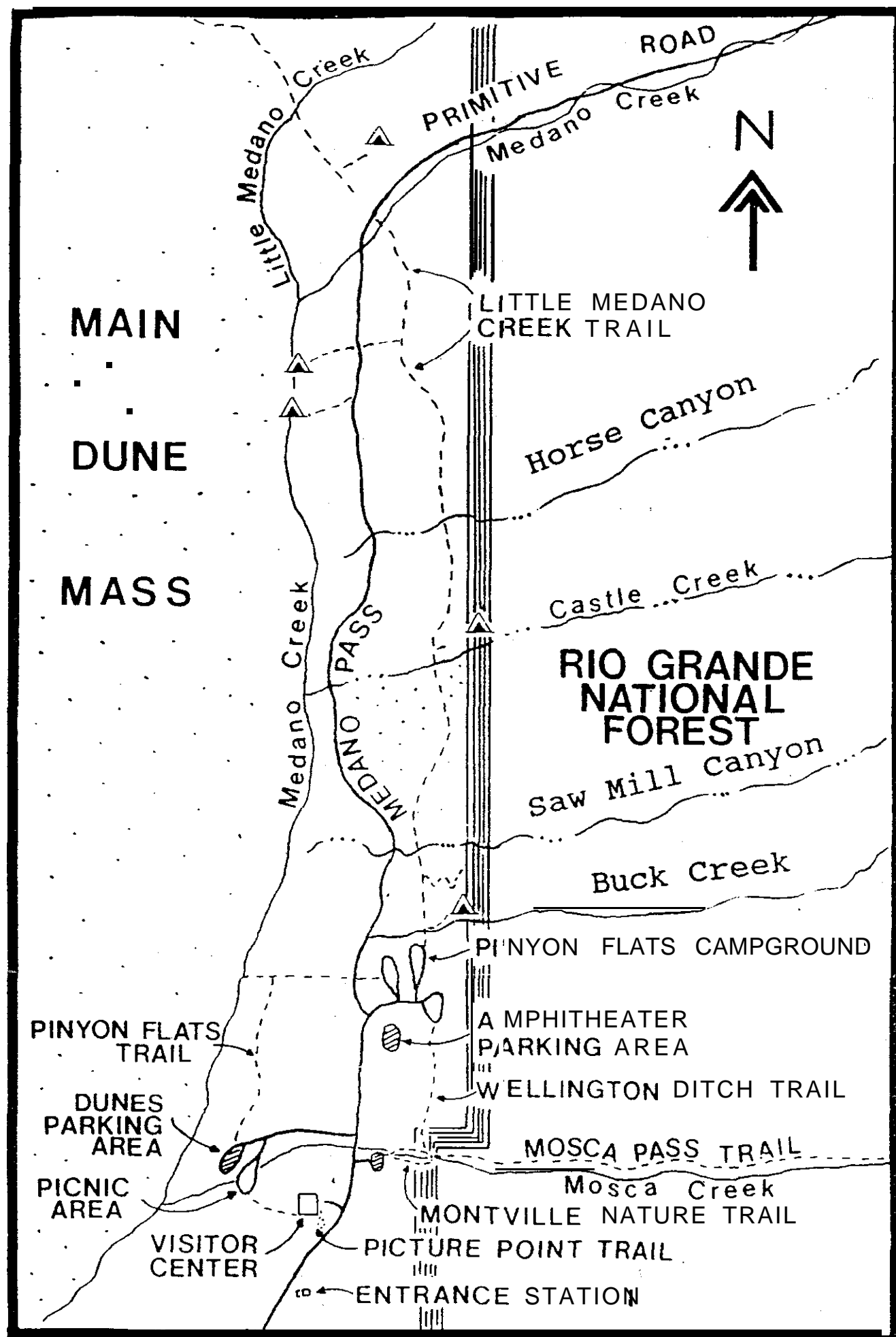
## SAND CREEK INVENTORY

1 Mirror	1 Coleman lantern (propane)
4 16.4 oz. Propane bottle	1 Roll weather stripping
3 rolls paper towels	4 rolls toilet paper
1 wash basin	1 2-man REI tent
6 garbage bags	1 skillet
1 Towel	1 medium pot
1 face cloth	2 dish towels
1 small pot	1 bowl/plate
4 D-Cell batteries	1 bag misc food
2 REI sleeping bags	1 bag matches
1 headlamp	6 forks
3 spoons	1 fuel funnel
1 stove	1 first-aid kit
1 water purifier	2 can's Coleman fuel
2 blue tarps	1 compass w/ directions
1 Flare	1 bottle insect repellant
1 light sticks	2 rolls flagging
1 flat screw driver	1 shovel
1 parachute cord	1 Phillips screwdriver
1 crescent wrench	2 horse brushes
1 pair pliers	1 set hobbles
1 hammer	1 hoofpick
1 fence pliers	4 leather straps
1 roll wire	2 spools barbed wire
1 can nails	1 carbonite fence pounder
1 5 qt. canteen	fence stakes
2 metal truck boxes	10 linear posts
1 pulaski	2 water bottles
1/2 garbage can grain	1 park map
1 Forest Service map	1 fuel flask
6 bales hay	1 canvas tarp
2 small bottle dish soap	2 lantern mantels
25 gallon size plastic bags	2 xerox maps of cold creek trail and campsites
1 fishing pole	1 tacklebox w/ salmon eggs & hooks

9/12/93

dr

## **APPENDICES**



**Fires:** Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

**Toilets:** There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.'

**Trash:** Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

**Wildlife:** Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

**Emergency:** The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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**Location of Campsite** "Buck Creek" is located 0.2 miles east of the Little Medano Trail adjacent to an aspen/cottonwood grove. It is the closest backcountry site to a trailhead.

**Number of Sites:** 1

**Distance:** 0.45 miles (0.28 km).

**Elevation/Change:** 8,480 (2561 m); 80' gain (24 m) gain.

**Source of Water:** Buck Creek usually flows year round near the campsite. Treat all water.

**Travel Time:** 20 minutes.

**Features:** This campsite has an outstanding view of the dune mass to the west. It is ideal for families with young children who cannot hike a long distance, but wish to camp in the backcountry. The aspen grove is colorful in the fall, and the sounds of the creek are especially nice.

**Trailhead:** Pinyon Flats Camnaround (Loop 2) or Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2wd vehicles.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: "Escape Dunes" is located 0.1 miles east from the Little Medano Trail in an open grove of ponderosa pine. The park boundary is directly east, and Castle Creek (which flows intermittently) is located just to the south.

Number of Sites: 1

Distance: 1.3 miles (2.1 km).

Elevation/Change: 8,440' (2573 m); 40' (12.2 m) gain.

Source of Water: Castle Creek, just to the south, normally flows from late spring to mid-summer. Medano Creek is 0.5 miles west. Treat all water.

Travel Time: 1/2 hour

Features: This site is adjacent to the Rio Grande National Forest and offers access into rugged, wooded canyons along the park's east boundary. "Escape dunes" are located just south of the campsite. These actively moving dunes formed when sand was blown eastward across Medano Creek in dry years, piling up against the foothills. Ghost forests, (places where dunes have smothered or buried pine trees) can be seen in the vicinity. Surge flow also occurs in Castle Creek.

Trailhead: Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2 wd vehicles.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: The " Indian Grove " site is located 0.2 mile west of the Medano Primitive Road. It lies on a bench, just above Medano Creek. Ponderosa pine, cottonwood and spruce surround the site.

Number of Sites: 1

Distance: 3.1 miles (1.9 km)

Elevation/Change: 8,340' ( 2543 m); 40' (12.2 m) loss

Source of Water: Medano Creek. Treat all water.

Travel Time: 1 1/2 to 2 hours

Features: Just to the north are many ponderosa pine trees with huge scars. These trees were peeled by the Ute Indians during the late 18th to early 20th centuries and utilized for food, medicine, and construction purposes. The inner bark was eaten and contained carbohydrates and important minerals, especially calcium. Trout fishing, close accessibility to the dunes and good views of nearby mountains are added features. Ponderosa pine, cottonwood and spruce surround the site.

Trailhead: Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2-wd vehicles.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occassionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Location of Campsite: " Little Medano " campsite is located 0.35 miles north of the Medano Primitive Road and just west of the park boundary. It lies in open grasslands and Montane woodlands of ponderosa pine.

Number of Sites: 1

Distance: 3.8 miles (6.1 km)

Elevation/Change: 8,660' (2640 m); 260' (79 m) gain

Source of Water: Medano Creek 0.4 miles south or Little Medano Creek, 0.4 miles north. Treat all water.

Travel Time: 2 hours

Features: Just north rises Mt. Herard (13,297') named after Ulysses Herard who settled and ranched in the Medano Creek area in the late 1870's as a boy. Remains of sawmill operations can be found nearby. A short walk up the dry gully to the west will reveal a beautiful aspen grove. The old Liberty stage coach route crossed Little Medano Creek just to the north, where the trail crosses the stream. Excellant views of Carbonate Peak (12,308'), California Peak (13,849'), and Twin Peaks (13, 580') dominate the southern horizon. Elk frequent this area from late fall to early spring.

Trailhead: Point of No Return, located one mile north on the Medano Pass Primitive Road, is accessible by 2-wd vehicles. An alternative is to park just outside the East Boundary Gate on Forest Service lands and hike along the road 0.2 miles east to the trail. A 4-wd is required for this trailhead.

**Fires:** Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. Use gas stoves.

**Toilets:** There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water and dig a hole 6" deep. Either bury or pack out toilet paper.

**Trash:** Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

**Wildlife:** Do not feed wildlife. Secure food at least 15' high and 5' out from the trunk of a tree. Bears are occasionally encountered. Remove all ropes when vacating site.

**Emergency:** The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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**Location of Camosite:** Southwest of the base of Mt. Herard is the Aspen campsite: about 1.8 miles north of the Sand Creek Trailhead. Open groves of aspen and meadows characterize this site.

**Number of Sites:** 1

**Distance:** 5.3 miles (8.5 km)

**Elevation/Change:** 9,240' (2,817 m); 840' gain (256 m)

**Source of Water:** Little Medano Creek is the closest reliable stream, about 1.3 miles away. Treat all water.

**Travel Time:** 2.5 to 3 hours

**Features:** The widely-spaced aspen trees have thick trunks and are short in stature. This site provides an remarkable vista of the dune mass to the south, snowy peaks northward, and is frequented by elk in the fall and winter. Be sure to explore the valley to the north.

**Trailhead:** Sand Creek Trailhead, or the monument's east boundary are the closest access points by 4-wd. From Point of No Return it is a longer hike and accessible by 2-wd.



**Features/Hazards:** Located in the bottomlands of Sand Creek the area is heavily forested with cottonwoods and hosts a variety of plants and wildlife unlike the dunes ecosystem. Fishing is generally good here (brook, cutthroat and brown trout). A Colorado State fishing license is required. In the fall elk bugle nearby and bald eagles can be sighted. Respect the private, fenced inholdings to the north and west, and do not trespass. Be sure to set up your tent in the clearing, and not beneath overhanging limbs which may fall unexpectedly, especially during windy periods.

Fires: Wood or charcoal fires are not allowed in the backcountry. There are no trees on the dunes - do not carry firewood onto the dunes. Use gas stoves.

Toilets: There are no facilities in the backcountry. Find an area at least 200' from water. In order to expedite the breakdown of feces, leave them on the surface and scatter a handful of sand atop. Temperatures of up to 140 degrees, wind and sun will quickly break down the fecal material. Please pack out all toilet paper.

Trash: Pack out all trash, including cigarettes.

Wildlife: Do not feed wildlife. Coyotes occasionally cross the dune mass. Do not camp on vegetated areas. They are fragile and inhabited by kangaroo rats, mice and rare insects.

Emergency: The closest phone is at the camper registration building near the Pinyon Flats Campground. Dial 911 or the emergency phone number listed on the board.

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Campsite Locations: You are required to hike west of the top of the main dune mass ridge which borders Medano Creek (see map on reverse) . Your camp should be hidden if possible from this ridge so that day hikers will not see your tent. This is generally a walk of about 1 to 1 1/2 miles. Failure to do so will result in a citation. Backpackers must camp north of a line drawn from Point of No Return to the west to avoid conflict with day users.

Number of Sites: Indefinite  
1 1/2 miles (1.6 to 2.4 km)

Distance: Minimal hike of 1 to

Elevation Change: 600' to 700' (183 m to 213 m) gain with variable loss afterwards.

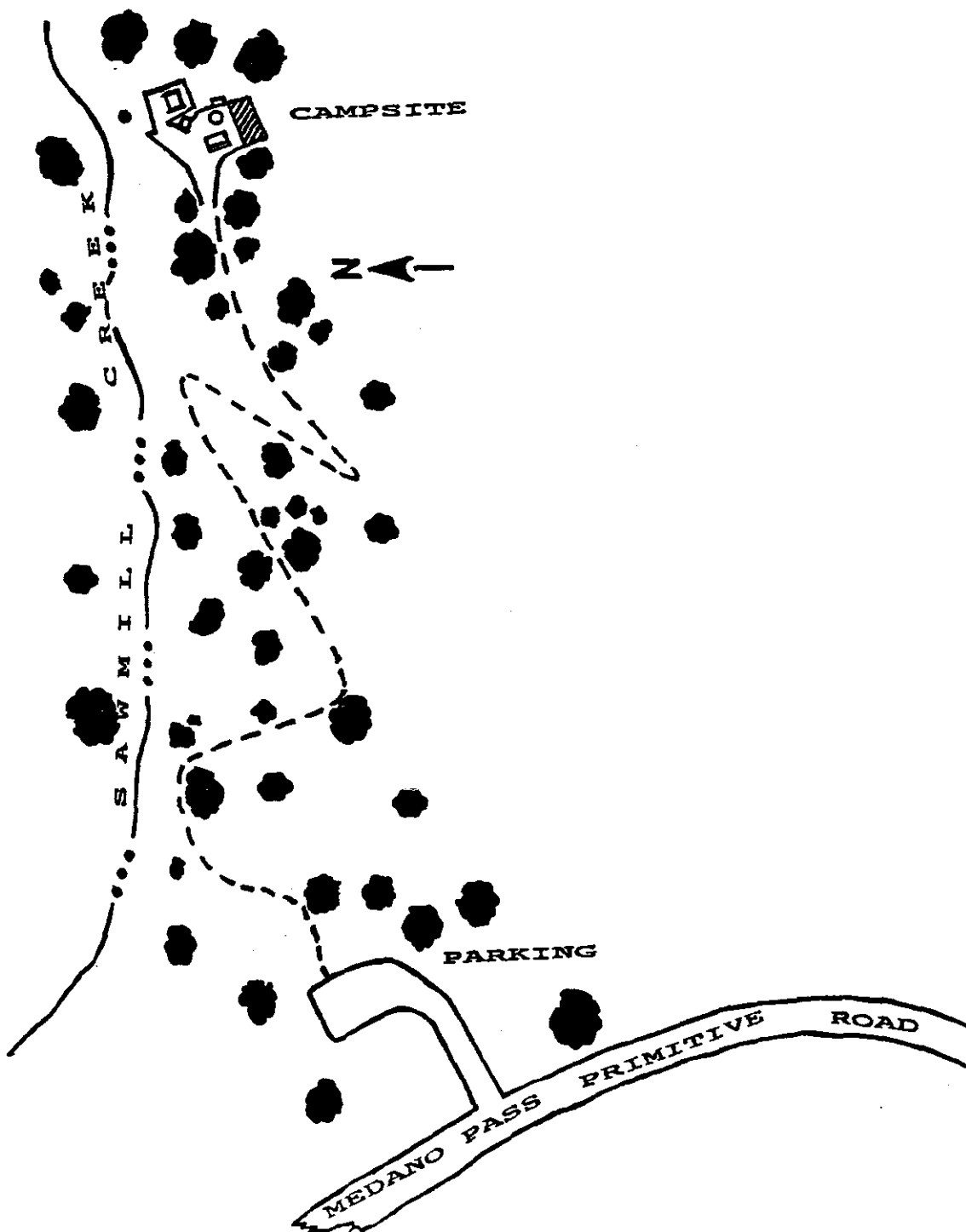
Source of Water: Bring water with you. Take plenty in the summer (min. 1 gallon/person/day).

Travel Time: 1 to 8 hours

Features/Hazards: Over half of all backcountry use permits are for the dunes wilderness. It is a unique and inspiring position to dwell for a night. The harsh dunes ecosystem, apparently devoid of life, contains well-adapted communities of plants and animals. At first glance a place that can seemingly sustain much impact with little damage. Closer examination reveals otherwise.

Extremely fragile communities of Indian rice grass, blowout grass, scurf pea, penstemons, prairie sunflowers and other plants live in

SAWMILL CANYON ACCESSIBLE  
BACKCOUNTRY CAMPSITE



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

BACKCOUNTRY USE PERMIT

The visitor must have this permit during the visit.

When signed, this single-visit permit authorizes.										CAMPSITE NAME		ZONE SITE	NIGHTS
NAME													
ADDRESS													
CITY													
To visit													
Give best estimate of start and finish dates													
FROM MO/DAY													
THROUGH MO/DAY													
Location of entry													
Location of exit													
Primary method of travel													
Number of people in group													
Number of pack or saddle stock													
Number of watercraft or other craft													
REMARKS													
DATE (VISITOR'S SIGNATURE)													
DATE (ISSUING OFFICER'S SIGNATURE)													

GREAT SAND DUNES NATL. MON.

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Lic.No./State \_\_\_\_\_

Date In/Out \_\_\_\_\_

Trailhead \_\_\_\_\_

-----



## VISITOR REGISTRATION CARD

Completion of this form is voluntary and is not required by law or to obtain a Federal benefit. However, we would appreciate your cooperation in providing us with information about your planned National Forest visit. It will help us plan for future management and protection of this area.  
We will enter the proper codes in the shaded blocks.

THANK YOU!

## (13) Travel Plan

If a travel zone map is available, list all zones that you will be traveling through, in sequence, and indicate the number of nights you plan to spend in each zone.

If travel zones are unknown, describe your planned trip by listing campsites, lakes or named landmarks you plan to visit and the number of nights you will spend in each area.

TRAVEL  
ZONE  
CODEN  
I  
G  
H  
T  
S

(1) NAME (Print, include initials, and year)

(2) MAILING ADDRESS (Optional)

(3) CITY AND STATE

(4) ZIP  
CODE

(5) AREA VISITING (Write name of area)

(6) DATES OF VISIT (Give best estimate of  
start and finish dates of your visit)From  
month/dayThrough  
month/day

(7) LOCATION OF ENTRY POINT (Write name of entry point)

(8) LOCATION OF EXIT POINT (Write name of exit point)

(9) PRIMARY METHOD OF TRAVEL (Write method such as hiking, horseback, canoe, etc.)

(10) NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN GROUP

(11) NUMBER OF PACK OR SADDLE STOCK

(12) NUMBER OF WATERCRAFT OR VEHICLES

(14) REMARKS - SUGGESTIONS



**AUTHORIZED OVERNIGHT TRAILHEAD PARKING LIMITS \***

- 1) Amphitheater Parking Lot: 5 vehicles
- 2) Pinyon Flats Campground/Little Medano Trailhead: 4 vehicles
- 3) Point of No Return: 5 vehicles
- 4) Sand Creek Trailhead: 2 vehicles (4-wd only)\*\*
- 5) Montville Nature Trail: 8 vehicles (USFS use)
- 6) Administration Bldg.: Overflow Parking (shuttle)

No overnight parking allowed at Dunes Lot, Day Use areas or along Medano Pass Primitive Road. All cars must display a current dash tag.

\* Memorial Day through Labor Day and busy spring/fall weekends.

\*\* Must park in USFS if lot full from day hikers.

People wishing to access USFS areas and **park in the monument will not be given preference over parking needed by visitors camping in the monument.**

**Backcountry Use Parking Permits**

Jan-March: White  
April: Blue  
May : Yellow  
June: Green  
July:  
August: Green  
September: Yellow  
October: Blue  
Nov-Dec:

**G**

**Saturday**

**N**

**Friday**

**T**

**Thursday**

**W**

**Wednesday**

**M**

**Tuesday**

**A**

**Monday**

**S**

**Sunday**

## **Backcountry** Campsite **Evaluation**

1. Name of Site \_\_\_\_\_ D a t e \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Elevation \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Slope/drainage for tents \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Hazard trees or limbs \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Trenching evidence \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Waste disposal Problems \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  7. Tree Damage (ropes in trees, sawn/chopped limbs, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  8. Out of bounds tent pad evidence \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  9. Erosion Problems (**Soil** Exposure : \_\_\_\_\_)  
(Root Exposure: \_\_\_\_\_)
  10. Wildlife **Problems/History** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  11. Impact from fishing (social trails, waste disposal, etc. ) **or** other activities  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  12. Danger from weather \_\_\_\_\_
  13. Access trail problems \_\_\_\_\_
  14. Vegetative Ground Cover \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Dominant Vegetation List \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Photos (paste on this page, include point taken and direction)

-----  
Map of campsite, indicate north, approximate distances, access trail, social trails, nearest water, dominant vegetation and campsite post locale.



OBSERVATION

Location

Date (Month, Day, Year)	Time (a.m., p.m.)	Weather
-------------------------	-------------------	---------

Description, Behavior, Number, Sketch, Map, Etc. (Use reverse if necessary.)

BE ACCURATE - DO NOT GUESS

Park: Observed by:

SPECIAL ORDER  
RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST

Pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations Sections 261.50(a),(b) when posted, the following is prohibited within 100 yards of each side of the centerline of the Montville Nature Trail and the Wellington Trail within the Conejos Peak Ranger District, Rio Grande National Forest, as depicted on attachment A by cross-hatching. These restrictions are in addition to those enumerated in Subpart A, 36 CFR 261. This order is to eliminate conflict of use and reasons for public health and safety. This order will be in effect until rescinded.

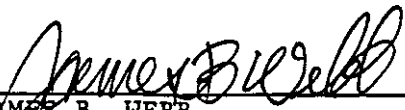
The following is prohibited.

- (1) Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire or stove fire. 36 CFR ~~261.52~~(2)
- (2) Camping. 36 CFR 261.58(e)
- (3) Discharging a firearm, air rifle or gas gun. 36 CFR 261.58(m)
- (4) Hunting. 36 CFR 261.58(v)

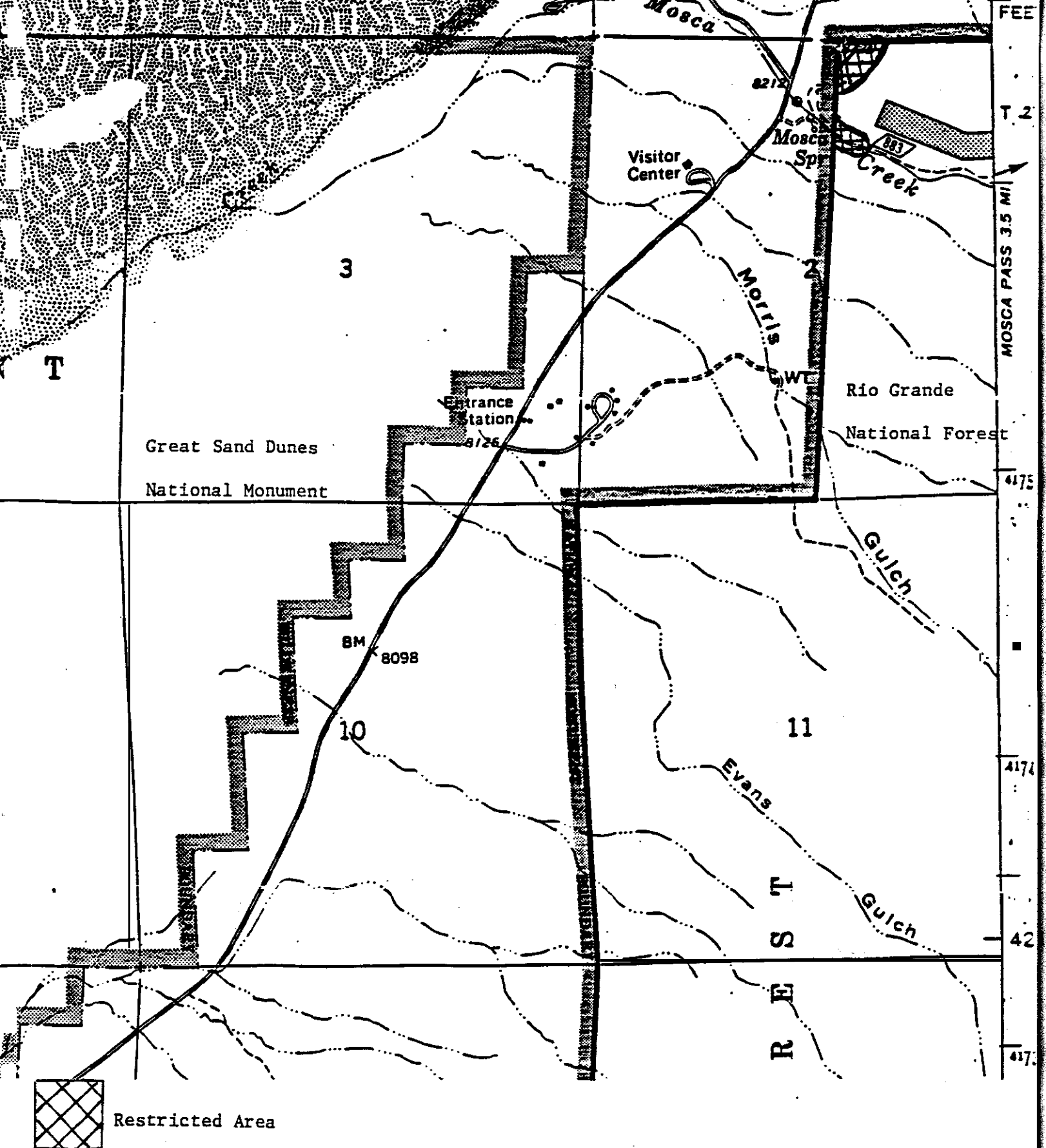
Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following persons are exempted from the order:

- (4) Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force to the performance of an official duty.

Done at Monte Vista this 24 day of June, 1994.

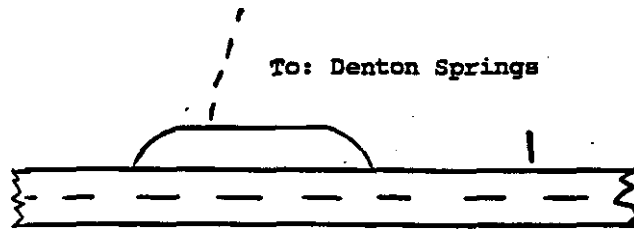
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JAMES B. WEBB  
Forest Supervisor  
Rio Grande National Forest  
Monte Vista, CO 81144

Violation of these regulations is punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000.00 or imprisonment of up to six months or both. 16 USC 551.

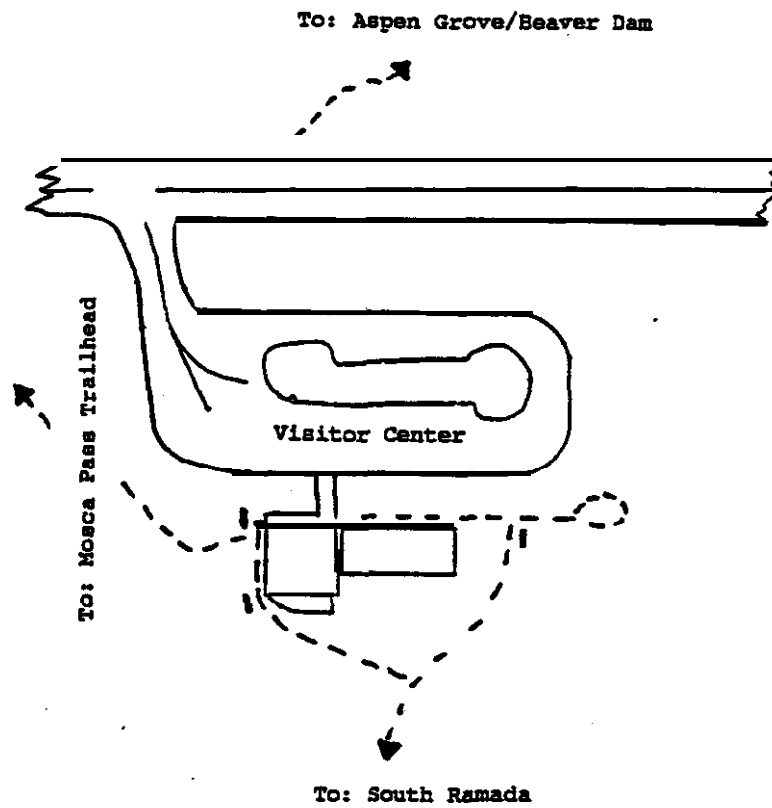


Attachment A

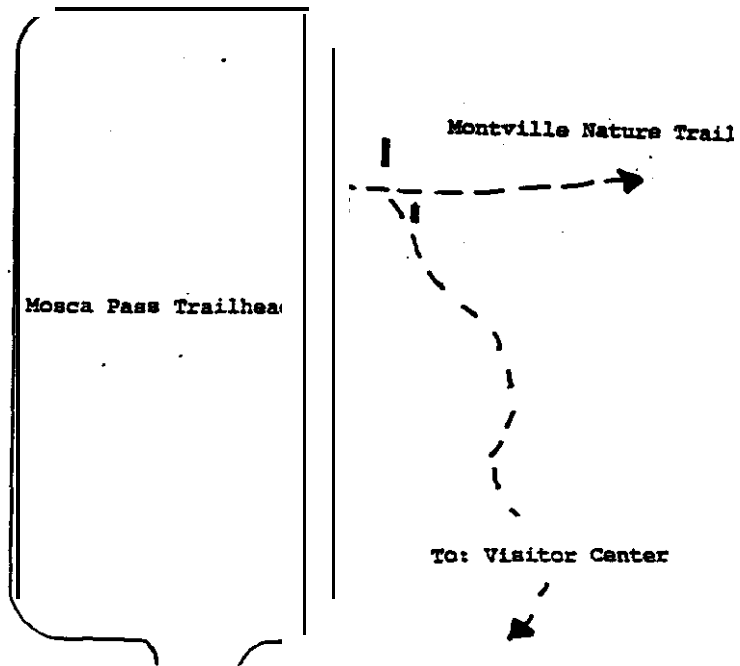
RG-94-20



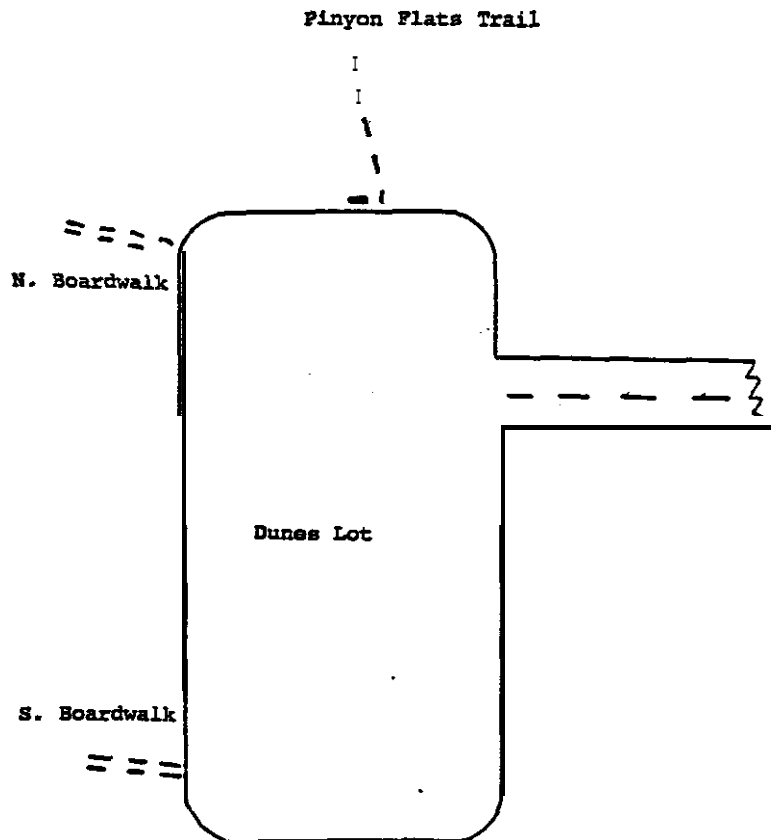
## DENTON SPRINGS TRAILHEAD



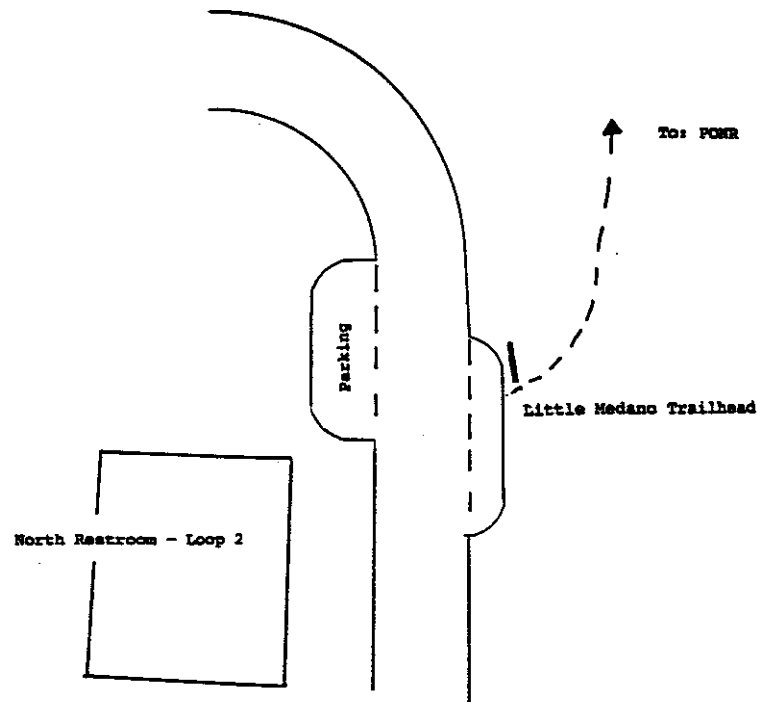
## VISITOR CENTER TRAILS COMPLEX



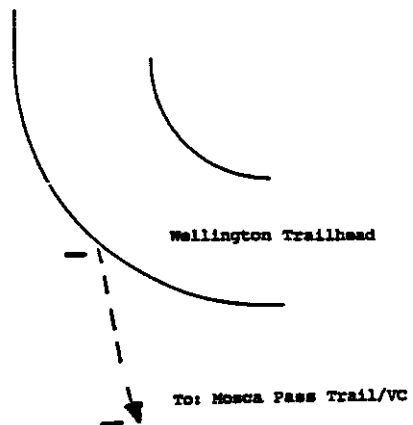
## MOSCA PASS/MONTVILLE NATURE TRAILHEADS



## PINYON FLATS TRAILHEAD



## LITTLE MEDANO TRAILHEAD



## WELLINGTON DITCH TRAILHEAD



## TRAIL MILEAGE AT **GREAT** SAND DUNES NATIONAL **MONUMENT**

Mileage is listed from south to north within the monument.  
All monument trails were measured with a 10' circumference wheel.

- 1) Denton Springs Trail: 0.7 miles (1.13 km)
  - 2) Morris Gulch (water tank to east bdy): 0.27 miles (0.44 km)
  - 3) Visitor Center to Corral: 0.47 miles (0.76 km)
  - 4) Beaver Pond area to jct w/ Montville - VC Trail: 0.13 miles (0.21 km)
  - 5) Picture Point Trail: 0.06 miles (0.1 km)
  - 6) Visitor Center to S. Ramada: 0.44 miles (0.71 km)
  - 7) Visitor Center to Montville Trailhead: 0.30 miles (0.5 km)
  - 8) Mosca Pass Trail: 3.5 miles (5.65 km)
  - 9) Montville Nature Trail: 0.48 miles (0.77 km)
  - 10) Wellington Ditch Trail: 0.92 miles (1.48 km)
  - 11) Pinyon Flats Trail: 0.59 miles (0.95 km)
  - 12) Campsround (Loop 2) to Dunes: 0.45 miles (0.73 km)
  - 13) Campground (Loop 2) to PONR: 1.0 miles (1.6 km)
  - 14) Dunes Overlook : 0.5 miles (0.81 km)
  - 15) Sawmill Canyon Handicamp: 0.1 miles (0.16 km)
  - 16) Little Medano Trail: 4.1 miles (6.61 km)
  - 17) Sand Pit Trail: 0.5 miles (0.8 km)
  - 18) Sand Creek Trail: 6.4 miles (10.32 km)
  - 19) Various Connector trails and Spurs: 0.8 miles (1.3 km)
  - 20) Dunes Lot to High Dune: 1.22 miles up(2 km); 1.1 miles down
- Total Park Trail Mileage = 18.21 miles\*
- \* (doesn't include Mosca Pass or high dune(29.4 km)